What is History? and other essays

Michael Oakeshott

Edited by Luke O'Sullivan

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This highly readable new collection of thirty pieces by Michael Oakeshott, almost all of which are previously unpublished, covers every decade of his intellectual career, and adds significantly to his contributions to the philosophy of historical understanding and political philosophy, as well as to the philosophy of education and aesthetics. The essays were intended mostly for lectures or seminars, and are consequently in an informal style that will be accessible to new readers as well as to those already well acquainted with Oakeshott's works.

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What is History?

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Preface

This volume will hopefully be the first of several collecting together Oakeshott's hitherto unpublished writings and those that remain difficult to obtain, scattered as they are throughout a variety of journals and periodicals. The focus of the present work is on previously unpublished essays and reviews in the Oakeshott archive at the London School of Economics. The LSE is therefore to be thanked for consenting to its publication. Professors K. Minogue, T. Fuller, J. Gray, and T. Nardin, as well as Mr L. Marsh of the Michael Oakeshott Association, all generously assisted in supporting the initial proposal to publish, and offered helpful advice on the contents of the volume, though of course responsibility for its final form rests solely with the editor.

Many hours were spent in the LSE archive transcribing the papers this volume contains. The staff of the reading room offered unfailingly prompt and cheerful assistance. Serendipitously, Dr Robert Grant, currently preparing a much-needed biography of Oakeshott, was working there at the same time. As previously, Imprint Academic proved an ideal publisher to work with, happily accommodating the inevitable changes that arose as the volume expanded far beyond the dimensions initially projected.

Luke O'Sullivan
London 2003

Introduction

Michael Oakeshott (1901–90) published his first book, *Experience and its Modes,* in 1933. It was nearly thirty years before his next work, the collection of essays entitled *Rationalism in Politics* appeared. Admittedly, this discounts *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe* and Hobbes's *Leviathan,* as well as a guide to picking the Derby winner he co-authored with Guy Griffith under the humorous title of *A Guide to the Classics,* but none of these were scholarly works he had composed himself. The first was a documentary reader, the second a new edition of a classic of political philosophy (for which, however, he did supply a noteworthy introductory essay), and the third, a serious betting manual. Thereafter, if we ignore another collection republishing several of his essays on Hobbes, *Hobbes on Civil Association,* he wrote only two more books, *On Human Conduct* and *On History.*[1]

During his tenure as Professor of Political Science at the London School of Economics from 1951 to 1967, Oakeshott enjoyed brief periods of notoriety, especially following his inaugural lecture on 'Political Education' and the appearance of *Rationalism in Politics,* both of which marked him out as a stringent critic of his own times. Otherwise, he was little studied except by a small circle of admirers, until in old age increasing recognition of his philosophical gifts led to an effort to make more of his writings publicly available. A collection of his essays on education, *The Voice of Liberal Learning*, and a second, considerably expanded, edition of *Rationalism in Politics* appeared, with his blessing, shortly before his death. These volumes were followed rapidly by two further works, *Religion, Politics, and the Moral Life*, including a number of neglected early essays on theology, and *Morality and Politics in Modern Europe*, a lecture series given at Harvard in 1958. After an only slightly longer pause, another hitherto unknown manuscript, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism*, probably also dating from the 1950s, issued from the press in 1995.[2]

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[1] Oakeshott, *Experience and its Modes,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1933; *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays,* Methuen, London: Barnes and Noble, New York, 1962; (ed.) *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1939; (ed.) Hobbes, *Leviathan,* Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1946; (with G.T. Griffith) *A Guide to the Classics, or, How to Pick the Derby Winner,* Faber and Faber, London, 1936; *Hobbes on Civil Association,* Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1975; *On Human Conduct,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1975; *On History,* Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1983.

Since that time, Oakeshott's reputation has grown further, to the point where many believe that he can hold a place amongst the best philosophers of any era.[3] Therefore, the general unavailability of numerous lectures and seminar papers that he had prepared for public presentation and left in a very finished condition seemed an unsatisfactory situation, given their potential to qualify, refine, and enlarge upon the ideas contained in his published works.[4] The thirty pieces offered here, then, cover each decade of his career from the 1920s to the 1980s, and range, at varying length, over every area of his interests. Collected together, they offer an overview of the development of his thought unique amongst all his books, posthumous or otherwise.[5]

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[2] Oakeshott, *The Voice of Liberal Learning: Michael Oakeshott on Education*, ed. T. Fuller, Yale University Press, London and New Haven, 1989; *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, 2nd edn., ed. T. Fuller, Liberty Press, Indianapolis, 1991; *Morality and Politics in Modern Europe: The Harvard Lectures, 1958*, ed. S. Letwin, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1993; *Religion, Politics, and the Moral Life*, ed. T. Fuller, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1993; *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism*, ed. T. Fuller, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1996.

[3] For a detailed study of Oakeshott's philosophy see T. Nardin, *The Philosophy of Michael Oakeshott*, Pennsylvania State University Press, Pennsylvania, 2001.

[4] For a custodial history and full list of Oakeshott's papers in the Oakeshott Archive at the London School of Economics, established in 1997, see the catalogue compiled by A. Towlson, available online (on 14 December 2003) at www.lse.ac.uk/library/archive/gutoho/oakeshott_michael.htm. For a comprehensive bibliography of Oakeshott's published writings and the secondary literature, based on the bibliography compiled by J. Liddington and first printed in *The Achievement of Michael Oakeshott*, ed. J. Norman, Duckworth, London, 1993, pp. 107-14, and currently maintained by E. Podoksik, see www.michael-oakeshott-association.org/pdfs/bibliography_whole.pdf (available online on the same date).

To illustrate this development, Oakeshott's writings have been presented in chronological order. They cover four main areas, in each of which he asked more or less the same questions throughout his career, while gradually revising his answers. The first area is the nature of philosophy and its relation to other human activities. The two essays most relevant to this question are 'An Essay on the Relations of Philosophy, Poetry, and Reality' (the longest in the volume), and 'Work and Play'. The second area is the logic of historical understanding. The ten pieces published here include essays on both the nature of historical thought, and on the course of historical events. One of the former, a review of E.H. Carr's famous work *What is History?*, provided the title for this collection, which begins and ends with items on the philosophy of historical understanding and historiography respectively. The third enduring area of interest was the nature of the state or 'civil association'. Typically, this interest was reflected back on itself, so that Oakeshott was also led repeatedly to examine the nature of the philosophical enquiry into politics on which he had embarked. There are fifteen items on politics and political philosophy, including two essays on the nature of political theory written almost fifty years apart. 'The Cambridge School of Political Science' and 'What is Political Theory?' illustrate perfectly the differences and continuities between the ideas of the young and the old Oakeshott. The final area with which he had an abiding concern was the philosophy of education, represented here by two essays, 'On Arriving at a University' and 'The Character of a University Education'. The remainder of this introduction briefly discusses each of these areas in turn.[6]

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[5] Four of the transcripts from the LSE archive were found to have been later printed elsewhere during the preparation of the volume, but were either sufficiently inaccessible or sufficiently interesting to be retained. These were 'The New Society', 'The New Science of Politics', 'The Philosophy of History' (1948), and 'Work and Play'.

[6] For a short introduction to Oakeshott's thought see R. Grant, *Oakeshott*, Claridge Press, London, 1990.

The Essays

1. *The Nature of Philosophy*

In the 1920s, Oakeshott inclined philosophically towards Spinozism and Platonic Idealism. These affinities made him a Rationalist, in the sense that he regarded philosophical definition as the most complete form of human understanding. *Experience and its Modes,* which acknowledged Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* and Bradley's *Appearance and Reality,* entailed significant alterations to his early ideas. If anything, it seems he was more influenced by Hegelianism and British Idealism in his later twenties and thirties than he had been in his youth. In early works like 'An Essay On The Relations of Philosophy, Poetry, and Reality', the young Oakeshott had been quite critical of 'English Hegelians' such as Sir Henry Jones whom he believed failed to share his conception of philosophy as the rational pursuit of correct definitions. Nevertheless, 'The Relations of Philosophy, Poetry, and Reality' was concerned, like *Experience and its Modes* (and indeed, like all of Oakeshott's later work) with the problems involved in classifying different regions of human thought and activity. It also provided the vocabulary of modality so prominent in *Experience and its Modes,* which seems to have come from Oakeshott's reading of Spinoza's *Ethics.*

'The Relations of Philosophy, Poetry, and Reality' is important, too, because it is Oakeshott's only substantial reflection on aesthetics prior to 'The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind' (1959). In both essays, 'poetry' is the term used to refer to all aesthetic experience. But in the 1920s Oakeshott made it embrace much more – not only artistic endeavours such as painting, music, and sculpture, but also religious and mystical experience, and in fact, 'intuitive' experience generally. In considering the claims of philosophy and poetry to give access to ultimate reality, Oakeshott preferred, if anything, the claims of the supra-rational, poetic and intuitive, aspect of human nature. Though this seems out of keeping with the Platonic Rationalism attributed to him above, it is perhaps simply an expression of a different strand in Plato, whose works contain not only a vision of the perfectly rational philosopher king, but also of a kind of man who has transcended even this, and now apprehends the divine form of the good directly.[7]

From one point of view, Oakeshott's subsequent intellectual career is the story of the gradual abandonment of this early belief in the possibility of unconditional knowledge of reality. Instead, he came to favour the idea that understanding consisted ultimately of an irreducible plurality of modes or 'voices', to use the conversational metaphor of which he became so fond. In this plurality, each 'voice' was of equally conditional status. What proved enduring in Oakeshott's early thought, then, was not the belief in the possibility of unmediated philosophical or poetic encounters with ultimate reality, but the idea that every form of understanding has its own unique conditions or presuppositions.

What has sometimes confused readers is that in *Experience and its Modes* Oakeshott still tended to see philosophy as superior to modes such as history, science, and 'practice' (our day-to-day attitude to the world). This distracted him from the ultimately more fruitful task of working out the logical presuppositions of the various modes, and lead him to speak of forms of thought such as history or natural science as 'arrests' in experience that were 'defective' just insofar as they fell short of being philosophical experience.

It is unfortunate that the paper on 'Work and Play' has yet to be dated precisely, as by the time it was written Oakeshott had completed a fundamental reconsideration of his philosophical position. The belief in philosophy as the queen of the sciences has been abandoned completely, and 'modality' is all that remains. The paper combines a Hobbesian view of persons as creatures of necessarily limitless wants with a phenomenological vision of them as integral components of a *Lebenswelt* to which, as intelligent beings, they may take up various attitudes. As in *Experience and its Modes*,[8] the attitude to the world which naturally occupied most of our time was the practical one (devoted to what he later called 'the business of life, death, and dinner'). The other modes were to be valued because of the temporary escapes they offered from the frequent frustrations of what Oakeshott was fond of calling, in the words of a Victorian hymn, 'the deadliness of doing'.[9]

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[7] See for example Plato, *Republic*, 517 c.

[8] Oakeshott, *Experience and its Modes*, p. 247: 'This form of experience is...at once the most primitive and the most general of all forms.'

The fatal flaw of the instrumental attitude to the world, one to which Hobbes had already pointed, was that desire can never be finally and unconditionally satisfied. Modernity for Oakeshott was the story of an impressive yet ultimately and inevitably futile exploration of the moral belief that 'the satisfaction of human wants...ought to be the exclusive attitude and engagement to which all else should be subordinated'. Work, once regarded as a divine injunction, had been transformed by the decline of Christian belief into an end in itself. A secularised religiosity was the hidden assumption behind the political commitment to economic growth: 'it binds us to this necessity of a 4% per annum increase in productivity'. Left unchecked, however, such an attitude was bound to prove self-destructive, because it failed to acknowledge that the satisfaction of one want necessarily generated another want, *ad infinitum*.

An escape from this dilemma, offering 'the happiness that comes from not having wants', was achievable via the kind of activity known as 'play', understood here in the broadest possible sense, as including all non-instrumental activity - perhaps even religion. So conceived, 'play' also accounted for all those forms of intellectual activity that aimed exclusively at understanding and explanation. Forms of thought that intend only to make the world more significant and more meaningful, such as philosophy, science, and history, were 'play'. So was artistic activity; though not committed to truth, it nevertheless belonged to the category of non-instrumental relationships to the world. And all these activities were essential to civilization.

Themes overlapping with both Oakeshott's later political thought and his philosophy of education are clearly visible here. His later writings on politics were highly critical of the idea of the state as a form of association primarily devoted to economic exploitation. At the same time, the instrumentalist educational policies that his philosophy of education condemned posed a danger to civilization, because they regarded some of the activities most inherently satisfying to human beings, not as ends in themselves, but as 'mere 'recreation' – 'relaxation' from work, the proper business of life. Such instrumentalism simply dismissed any intellectual activity that could not be turned into 'useful knowledge'.

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[9] James Proctor, 'It is finished'. The relevant verse runs: 'Till to Jesus' work you cling / By a simple faith, / "Doing" is a deadly thing— / "Doing" ends in death.'

2. *Historical Understanding*

Of course, the only way to preserve such 'playful' forms of non-instrumental activity was by ensuring the continued cultivation of forms of thought like history. In one sense, Oakeshott's earliest efforts in this direction were unpromising. The essay 'History is a Fable' takes its title from Napoleon's remark, and regretfully reached the conclusion that the historian was condemned to 'recording the past through the spectacles of the present'. Oakeshott was convinced at this early stage that the historian could never reach 'the past as it was'. Those familiar with his thought will realise at once that this position differs significantly from the one he adopted in his published writings on the philosophy of history beginning with *Experience and its Modes*. That work, as we saw, regarded historical knowledge as ultimately less satisfactory than philosophy, but nevertheless dismissed scepticism about the possibility of historical knowledge as such.

The explanation for Oakeshott's early scepticism about the possibility of historical knowledge lies in what might be called his 'psychological' approach. There were, he argued in 1923, two main elements to historical understanding: objective 'events in time', and subjective 'recollection of these events in the mind'. These objective events in the past were necessarily inaccessible, because 'Each discovery is but the reaction of the records of history upon a different personal experience…and is not more likely to correspond with the fact than any other'.

By the time Oakeshott published *Experience and its Modes*, though, he had concluded that an absolute separation between subject and object was an impossibility. As far as historical thought was concerned, therefore, the idea of independently existing but entirely unknowable events in the past was nonsensical. The elegance of this move is obvious: once one gets rid of the idea that a past event is like a fly in amber, something frozen somewhere in time, the problem of whether the account given by the historian accurately corresponds to it disappears, or at least is entirely transformed in meaning. History books correspond, not to past objects, but the results of questioning directed at present objects selected by historians as evidence for the events they related.

Indeed, even in the 1928 essay on 'The Philosophy of History', no trace of this early psychological view remains. Already, Oakeshott was establishing a firm grip on another distinction fundamental to all his later work on the philosophy of historical understanding, the distinction between two different senses of the word 'history'. The term could refer either to a series of events, or to a form of enquiry. On this basis he separated 'critical' philosophy of history, which investigated the assumptions of historical thought, from 'speculative' philosophies of history, which attempt to discover general laws governing the course of human affairs both past and future. Unlike Spengler, prophesying an age of coming decadence, or Schlegel, seeking a prop for Christianity, the interest of ordinary historians in the interconnectedness of past events did not commit them to the discovery of future developments as revealed in a divine plan or a natural scientific law.

In a shorter piece also entitled 'The Philosophy of History', written some twenty years later for a 1948 radio broadcast, Oakeshott revisited the distinction between critical and speculative philosophy of history with greater brevity and clarity. He acknowledged the study of historical methodology as a distinct field, and stressed the qualified relationship between the conclusions of philosophers and the labours of historians, saying that it was not the business of the philosopher 'to give directions to the historian about how he shall think and write', although 'the relation between the two is reciprocal'.

Historians could perhaps benefit from 'philosophical criticism' of their 'general ideas...such as cause and effect, growth and decay, development, change, progress, success and failure'. In turn, philosophers needed the work of historians to meditate upon. Oakeshott later qualified this somewhat in *On History* when he concluded that in principle the conditions of historical enquiry could be specified even if the activity itself had never been prosecuted.[10] There was, however, no suggestion that philosophers were handing down tablets to their humble servants.

Nor did Oakeshott claim at any stage that his philosophy of historical enquiry entailed specific methodological consequences for historians. 'What Do We Look For in an Historian?' made clear that there was no single correct answer to the question of how history should be written. 'Most of an historian's sins', he declared, 'particularly if he sins boldly and well, make his writing more interesting, and make him a better historian than he would otherwise be...save us only from the historian with no sins'. The essence of his position seems to have been that historians were ultimately identifiable as such by the presuppositions discernible in their writings, but regardless of their shared presuppositions, a Gibbon and a Macaulay would write differently, reflecting the differences in their character, methods, and subject.

It was, however, possible for historians to make use of inappropriate presuppositions that could vitiate their efforts. Oakeshott understood Butterfield's *The Whig Interpretation of History* as singling out a particular example of this fault, the confusion between the practical and historical perspectives on the past. The 'Whig' view of history, as Butterfield defined it, was 'the habit of reading the course of events backwards, and in this manner making history a success-story' concerned with the contemporary relevance of past events and apportioning praise or blame insofar as the path of progress was fostered or hindered.

It was precisely this fault that Oakeshott detected in the work of another Cambridge historian, E.H. Carr. Carr's efforts to establish the inexorable nature of historical progress inevitably produced an oversimplified idea of the past. The difference between Oakeshott and Carr is neatly brought out in Carr's own declaration that the business of the historian was 'to analyse the past in the light of the present'. This for Oakeshott was one of the definitive characteristics of the 'practical' idea of the past. An authentically historical perspective on past events, one that understood those events in terms of their own past and not their relevance to present concerns, he concluded, never appeared in Carr's argument.

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[10] Oakeshott, *On History*, p. 118.

The emergence of an historical profession assuming a distinction between the ordinary and a scholarly view of the past is one of the themes of the long paper on 'The Emergence of the History of Thought'. The essential condition of the modern approach to writing the history of ideas, Oakeshott argued, was a recognition of the difference between the views of the past intellectuals had constructed for themselves out of a need to justify their own present undertakings, and the intellectual past viewed in terms of its own past. Throughout European history thinkers of every persuasion had constructed their own pantheons of founders, of heroes and villains, fools and saviours; and the aim of such versions of the intellectual past was to be useful, like any other kind of practical past. For example, when in his *Physics* 'Aristotle gives some account of the ideas of his predecessors', he was 'locating himself, identifying himself and his own enterprise by evoking an intellectual past, an epic of physical speculation, to which he as a physicist claims to belong'.

Despite this choice of a classical example, Oakeshott was most interested in the period succeeding the fifteenth century. The Humanists and the Protestant Reformers, the Baconians (and their latter-day representatives the Fabians), and the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment had all constructed appropriate myths of their intellectual past. Indeed, the legendary past of the Enlightenment, a story of a unilinear and progressive process, still dominated the modern world; Oakeshott regarded Carr's history of the Russian revolution, which he reviewed for the *Cambridge Journal*, as a good example.[11] Nevertheless, while the Enlightenment legend was not itself authentically historical, it had contingently promoted an understanding of the intellectual past that was.

Hegel's *History of Philosophy* was particularly important in bringing about this change, though Vico and the Scottish Enlightenment had already played a significant part. Slowly, the idea of the march of mind was replaced by 'Men thinking in specific, local intellectual circumstances'. The materialistic metaphor which attributed 'solid, timeless characters' to ideas, treating them 'as quasi-physical objects, inherited, passed on, possessed or rejected', was replaced by an understanding of them as 'thoughts capable only of provoking thought'.

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[11] Oakeshott, 'Mr Carr's First Volume', *Cambridge Review*, 4 (1951), 504-6.

The single most important change, however, was the recognition that the historian does not achieve direct access to past reality. The thoughts of the past have to be created, like all historical events, through the use of evidence such as 'pieces of writing, sermons, prayers, speeches, proceedings in courts of law, rituals, works of art, compositions, buildings, institutions, accounts of actions' and so on. Only when this constructionism had been implicitly accepted did Oakeshott think that history as we have it today, the discipline on which his own works were a meditation, had appeared.

Oakeshott was also interested in the specific problems posed by particular branches of intellectual history, especially the history of political thought. In 'Political Thought as a Subject of Historical Enquiry', he argued that the problems facing the historian of political thought were in some ways 'more severe than that of any other historian.' Although the usage of the words 'politics' and 'thought' in ordinary speech allowed the activities they denoted to be reliably identified in general terms, 'if the historian simply accepts them in the form they are offered...confusion will be the likely result.'

Conceptual definitions of the words 'politics' and 'thought' were unhelpful. Historical inquiry presupposed the attempt 'to understand and display an intellectual situation in terms of the antecedents which made it historically what it was, which converged to constitute its historical character'. If 'this intellectual situation is conceptually defined, the only relevant antecedents will be those which are conceptually affiliated to it. And in place of a passage of intellectual change composed of contingently related intellectual events', we 'will have only a changeless situation surrounded by other situations recognised solely in terms of their approximation to or divergence from it', the major flaw of Gierke's *Natural Law and the Theory of Society*.

The solution was simply to accept that the expression 'political thought' did not itself identify 'a separable and coherent continuity of intellectual change'. To treat it as if it did produced nothing better than 'scrap-books of deceptively similar intellectual adventures'. It was better to forget it altogether; after all, there were many examples of historical works which had successfully managed to avoid the problems its use had posed. An emphasis on context, on a thematic continuity of change, or on a specific debate, were all means for historians to give a more convincing unity to their works than the illusory expression 'political thought' could provide. Oakeshott's enthusiastic paper on Hay's *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* is ample evidence that he was not overcome in old age by a renaissance of his youthful scepticism about the possibility of historical knowledge.

Oakeshott's reader's report for a projected work on 'The Historiography of Max Lenz' neatly illustrates the overlap between his writings on the historical past and the works on political thought to which we will turn next. Lenz was a follower of Ranke who wanted to escape from his master's emphasis on the primacy of diplomatic and international relations. Ranke had believed that only in the arena of foreign affairs did rationality become visible in history, but Lenz wanted to tell the story of German history as a self-standing tale, something 'Ranke believed to be inherently impossible, and not merely circumstantially difficult'. Lenz found the 'intelligible principle' he was looking for in 'the unresolved tension between secular and religious authority'. This, he believed, was what had driven events in Germany ever since the Reformation.

This story of European history as a tension between two forms of community was by no means confined to historians in the nineteenth century, of course: philosophers, jurists, and, later, sociologists all became involved in exploring this version of events. The impact on English political and historical thought around the turn of the century was considerable, fostering the movement usually referred to as 'pluralism'. F.W. Maitland, whom Oakeshott was inclined to regard as the very model of historical scholarship, was a great admirer of Otto von Gierke's work, in which a ruthless Hobbesian individualism was argued to have destroyed a mediaeval communalism it had become the task of modern German constitutional reformers to recover.

3. *Political Philosophy*

Oakeshott began reading for the History Tripos at Cambridge just as one of the historians who had been most influential in establishing the intellectual context of pluralism, J.N. Figgis, died. As Oakeshott put it later on, Figgis, under Maitland's influence, had set out to 'plead the rights of individuals to be associated in Groups, the rights of Groups to determine their own constitutions and activities and the rights of Groups against the "sovereign" state'.[12] In the 1920s, Oakeshott had accepted this pluralist agenda, and in one sense, continued to support it all his life, even when political theorists and historians ceased to fear the threat of social atomism posed by the modern state. What he became increasingly sceptical about were, firstly, the metaphysical arguments for the real personality of the group that nineteenth-century pluralists had employed to defend the independence of associations such as churches and trade unions from the state, and, secondly, the tendency to treat the state as an association of the same kind as any other. In his later writings, Oakeshott would argue that unlike other forms of communal association, the state was not a group to which one had ordinarily chosen to belong, and hence the obligations that membership of a state imposed had to be justified in a different fashion.

Oakeshott used his essay on 'The Cambridge School of Political Science' s dissatisfaction with the Political Science options he had taken as part of the History Tripos at Cambridge. He disliked the continued dominance in Cambridge of the 'inductive' empirical approach to politics developed by figures such as J.R. Seeley in the second half of the nineteenth century. At best this approach offered knowledge of historical fact, and could never provide definitions of the essence of key concepts such as the State. 'A Discussion of Some Matters Preliminary to the Study of Political Philosophy', Oakeshott's first, still unpublished, full-length work, attempted to supply such definitions, and in doing so, revealed a sympathy with the prevailing pluralist philosophy of group life.

In the lectures Oakeshott gave on 'The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe' in the late 1930s to accompany the book of the same name, his approach clearly grew out of his early pluralist concern with the nature of group life. The opening lecture, reproduced here, opened with some remarks on early human history, before presenting a theory of association in which civilized communities were distinguished from more primitive groups by the existence of an articulate 'communal self-consciousness'.

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[12] Oakeshott, report on D. Nicholls, *Authority in Church and State: Aspects of the Thought of J.N. Figgis and his contemporaries*, LSE 1/2/3.

Oakeshott told his students that the appearance of political doctrines which made 'firmer and more rigid as well as more coherent' the life of the group which generated them, and provided motives for action, was at least as old as Thucydides. For the origins of modern politics, however, he did not consider it necessary to look further back than the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The social and political doctrines of contemporary Europe — Liberalism, Communism, Fascism, and National Socialism — formed a spectrum in which the three trends dominating the twentieth century, secularism, nationalism, and relativism, were all at work. Liberal doctrine, in which these trends had first emerged, had hardened into orthodoxy during the nineteenth century, and was now the object of an increasingly extreme reaction. The newer the doctrine, the more violent the reaction, with National Socialism being the most radical of all. Hitler's exaltation of the will and hostility to reason were the ultimate consequences, to Oakeshott's mind, of the trends he saw at work in the modern world.

The wartime essay 'On Peace with Germany' extends the view Oakeshott developed in his lectures of National Socialism as a quasi-tribal form of rule aimed solely at domination. The only substantial piece he is known to have written during his military service, it expressed a fear of winning the war but losing the peace because of a failure to appreciate the fundamental reason for the conflict, the character of the German people. Character became an unfashionable concept in the second half of the twentieth century thanks in large part to the racial and anti-Semitic connotations with which National Socialism imbued it, but Oakeshott was keen to emphasise that no belief in real essences was involved in his theorisation of ordinary usage: 'character' implied, but was not a 'cause' of, conduct. Acceptance of its explanatory power required only an assent to the possibility of observing patterns in human action.

To know an individual's character, Oakeshott argued, was to have specific beliefs about that persons dispositions, and definite expectations about how they were likely to act. On this basis, it was possible to speak of the character not only of individuals, but of associations of individuals. All well-established human associations revealed a political character, a tendency to do things in a certain way, 'the product of long continued movement which has gradually chiselled out its own restrictions', as he put it in 'The Idea of "Character" in the Interpretation of Modern Politics'. An historic character might occasionally undergo sudden and radical change, but more usually it oscillated within more or less clearly defined limits.

Thus, Oakeshott saw character as a non-behaviouristic concept useful for interpreting patterns of conduct, not only in the individual, but in the group, at every level from the small community to the nation state. Applied to the war, this theory prompted him to claim that the habits of thought, speech, and action the Germans had acquired in the last century or two constituted their character, and made the conflict intelligible. A lust for domination born of a deep-seated lack of inner self-confidence, Oakeshott believed, was, in the last analysis, the root of the Nazi conflagration.

Understanding the causes of the war was one thing, but the question of how to prevent further conflict was quite another. This was the problem under consideration in 'The Voice of Conversation in the Education of Mankind', which appears to have been written soon after the 1939-45 war ended.[13] It develops the idea of a 'politics of conversation', a phrase uncommon in Oakeshott's published work, but which he used in a 1948 letter to Sir Karl Popper to describe a style of politics that excluded violence of the sort they had just witnessed.[14] The title is strikingly similar to *The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind*, published in 1959,[15] and it is true that there is some overlapping of subject-matter in the general discussion of conversation.

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[13] It may have been written much earlier; some of the language used is strikingly similar to Oakeshott's review of L.P. Smith, *Afterthoughts*, and F.H. Bradley, *Aphorisms*, *Cambridge Review*, 52 (1930-1), 287.

[14] Oakeshott to K. Popper, 28 January 1948, Hoover Institution, Stanford, California. An annotated transcript of this letter, together with Popper's reply and Oakeshott's response, was available online on 2 October 2003 at www.michael-oakeshott-association.org/lifeworkspopper.pdf.

[15] Oakeshott, *The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind*, Bowes and Bowes, London, 1959. The essay was subsequently republished in *Rationalism in Politics*.

However, *The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind* is a warning about the dangers of an excessively pragmatic or scientistic outlook on the world, focused on the neglect of one in particular of the 'playful' voices, the poetic or aesthetic aspect of experience. 'The Voice of Conversation in the Education of Mankind' has nothing to say on this subject, but expresses the still all too pertinent opinion that any (ideologically inspired) attempt to have the last word in politics is self-defeating, not simply because it alienates others, but because the conversation will soon be likely to deteriorate into violence.

Although the world had survived the threat to freedom posed by National Socialism, in the immediate aftermath of the war Oakeshott became worried by ideological politics of another kind. He was alarmed by what E.H. Carr called the growth of the 'New Society', a phenomenon Oakeshott interpreted as a potentially insidious collectivist consensus. Though he recognised that it was unfair to say Carr saw 'mass democracy' and 'planning for the social purpose of equality' as unqualified goods, he worried that Carr had evaded rather than confronted the 'problems which the "New Society" brings'. Perhaps the greatest of these was Rationalism, not in the sense of Oakeshott's own youthful faith in philosophical definition, but in the sense of a belief in the perfectibility of society through 'scientific' planning. The only option for those who disliked this development, Oakeshott complained, was to 'live in the interstices of… society and…trust in its imprecisions'.

Oakeshott found Voegelin's *The New Science of Politics* (1952) a far more impressive diagnosis of modernity than Carr's efforts. He made gentle fun of 'a vocabulary rich in abstract nouns…in which any word is liable to acquire a couple of extra syllables', but nevertheless was entirely in sympathy with Voegelin's attack on the positivistic attempt to imitate physics by constructing a 'value-free' approach to political studies. This positivism harboured what Voegelin regarded as one of the most dangerous political trends in the modern world, the desire to reverse the separation between the practice of politics and the pursuit of salvation that Christianity had effected.

The desire to make government the leader of 'a mystical work of self-salvation' was 'Gnosticism,' the religious counterpart of the secular 'Rationalism' Oakeshott was then dissecting. Both Voegelin and Oakeshott took the seventeenth-century English Puritans as early exemplars of these tendencies, and seized on Hobbes as one of the chief exponents of an opposing school of thought. Voegelin's thought seems to have left its mark, for though Oakeshott does not mention him by name elsewhere, he did use the term 'gnosticism' to refer to millenarian supporters of early versions of the 'enterprise association' the modern state threatened to become.

The essay on 'Freedom and Power', which almost certainly dates from the later 1940s or early 1950s, was a further attempt to outline a sceptical, anti-Rationalistic, philosophy of politics. To the early twenty-first century reader, the description of society as constituted by power relationships and involving 'wide and often subtle forms of submission' almost inevitably evokes post-modern theories of politics as nothing more than a means of control and domination. When Oakeshott used such terms, however, he was expressing a Hobbesian realism about the tendency of power to be always hungry for more power. This was certainly a sceptical view, but it avoided pessimism with the thought that in practice the exercise of absolute power was as impossible a condition as complete freedom from power. It was possible to exert at least some control over the 'mixture' of power and freedom, thereby frustrating the growth of power and protecting the exercise of freedom. Much of the paper is tied to a less than completely convincing discussion of 'history' (really Oakeshott's own version of what he called the practical past) contrasting the development of English and European conceptions of freedom, though it is for the reader to judge whether this entirely undermines his overall argument.

The following essay, 'Conduct and Ideology in Politics', suggests that effective political action was often hampered in the modern world by a lack of clarity about how political commitments (to 'liberalism', or 'democracy', for example) could be reconciled with the demands of a particular situation. It was important not to treat 'democracy' or 'liberalism' as fixed, unchanging identities. The values and principles we now associate with liberty and democracy do not correspond to ideal objects (though Oakeshott himself, we saw, had once believed something like this). Instead, an abstract idea – such as the concept of human beings as bearers of universal rights –was to be understood as a subsequent extrapolation from an historic procedure of doing justice, in which specific remedies were offered for particular wrongs.

For Oakeshott, then, 'liberalism' and 'democracy' were shorthand expressions for complex historic forms of public life. 'The Idea of "Character" in the Interpretation of Modern Politics' explores this theme in relation to modern European states. Their character was ultimately attributable, Oakeshott now argued, to the vast increase in the power of governments in the late Renaissance and early modern period, which in turn was based ultimately on the scientific and technological revolutions of the time. Oakeshott had earlier attributed the rise of 'Rationalism in politics' to this increase in power; he now offered a more complex account, in which an unprecedented surge in the 'ability to control men and things' provided the experience to which modern European political thought had been all at once a response, a spur, and a hindrance. In particular, modern political thinkers had been moved to reflect on what governments ought to do. This was a subject Oakeshott believed had not interested mediaeval thinkers much, beyond their emphasis on the obvious tasks of doing justice and maintaining order, largely because the governments with which they were familiar were so much weaker that it was inconceivable they might engage in the kinds of adventures that became common in later centuries.

Before the war, Oakeshott had remarked that the difference between 'left' and 'right' was far less important than the 'fundamental cleavage' between those who would 'plan and impose a way of life upon a society', and those who 'consider the whole notion of planning the destiny of a society to be both stupid and immoral.'[16] Fascism, Communism, and National Socialism were all prepared to 'hand over to the arbitrary will of a society's self-appointed leaders the planning of its entire life.' In the 1950s, having exhausted his polemical impulse in his attacks on Rationalistic collectivism, Oakeshott began to elaborate on this belief. He now argued that modern politics were constituted by the tension between the disposition to treat government, on the one hand, as a purposive enterprise, and on the other, to regard it as limited to adjudicating disputes arising from the activities of its citizens. He experimented with many different formulations to describe this distinction. It is the difference, for example, which the labels of 'The Politics of Faith' 'and the Politics of Scepticism' were intended to indicate, but in this essay the difference is identified as the discrepancy between an understanding of government as a 'first-order' and as a 'second-order' activity.

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[16] Oakeshott, 'Introduction' to *The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe*, pp. xxii-xxiii.

Oakeshott's reading of early modern political thinkers such as Hobbes and Hooker were clearly key moments in the process by which he arrived at this distinction between first- and second-order conceptions of government. The lecture on Hooker included here appears to have been written shortly after the publication of Oakeshott's edition of *Leviathan*, to which it refers. It deals mainly with the first of the eight books of *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. Hooker's treatment therein of the nature of law was, as Oakeshott recognised, deeply indebted to classical and mediaeval thought. Yet Hooker was also forced by the threat of Puritanism to the fragile Elizabethan compromise of the Anglican settlement into novel departures. Hooker's retort to Puritanical unwillingness to accept anything felt to conflict with inspiration and scripture was a new emphasis on the importance of the positive law of the sovereign. He gave a stark warning that there would be 'no end of contention, without submission of both parts unto some definitive sentence'.[17] Hobbes inherited similar religious difficulties, and adopted, so Oakeshott believed, a similar solution, resting Leviathan on the authoritative and obligatory qualities of man-made law.

In the Oakeshottian scheme of things, then, both Hooker and Hobbes had already been forced to deal with the distinctive tension that constituted the modern European political order. The more Puritanical Protestants, as we observed in Oakeshott's account of the emergence of the discipline of the history of ideas, had constructed a legend of the intellectual past in which they were uniquely placed to establish virtue; in creating its own narrative, the *philosophe*s of the Enlightenment had simply substituted the dawn of rationality for the genesis of godliness as the culmination of human history. But these practical views of the past, it now turns out, were not without political consequences; for both the Puritan and the *philosophe*, the purpose of government was to assist in realising their desired state of affairs. In this enthusiasm for salvation and emancipation, however, both they and their descendants, amongst whom, we must emphasise yet again, Oakeshott included both 'left-' and 'right-wing' thinkers and governments, had been in constant danger of throwing the rule of law to the winds, and simply demanding that their own vision of the good life be forcibly imposed.

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[17] R. Hooker, 'Preface' Chapter 6, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*.

What Oakeshott found valuable in modern representative democracy, however, was precisely its offer of legal protection for the individual against this kind of interference. The essays in this volume show him performing a delicate balancing act, trying to combine a defence of existing democratic practice as probably, at worst, the least unpleasant form of politics, with criticism of the 'ambiguous and unmanageable concept' of democracy. His review of Spearman's *Democracy in England* emphasised that the miscellaneous constitutional changes collectively characterising modern English government were by no means all in keeping with the conditions necessary for successful democratic government. Indeed, some were positively 'opposed' to the intentions of those who had established universal suffrage, who had not assumed the existence of large numbers of democratic subjects who would be in need of 'tutelary care'. He was clear, nevertheless, that the ills of the modern world were not 'exclusively attributable to the extension of the franchise', but were far more plausibly attributed to military and economic causes.

Many of Oakeshott's reservations about the idea of democracy stemmed from the ambiguity of ordinary political speech, a difficulty to which he constantly drew attention in his later years. A word like 'democracy' could refer both to a government that had been constituted in a certain way, and to a government that acted in a certain manner. In fact, he regarded the former usage as the 'most appropriate'. If a democratic government was one that was responsible to the people, then the belief that its authority would be enhanced if it had been assembled as a result of a process of popular election was easily intelligible. But it was not so easy to understand policies of increasing the number of police officers, introducing compulsory identity cards, or building more roads as self-evidently 'democratic' measures.

Part of the problem was that the prestige attached to the adjective 'democratic' in the context of its usage as an authorization word was frequently borrowed for use in rhetorical attempts to gain approval for the policies of the day whatever they might be. Those not sensitive to the ambiguity inherent in political speech might thus be swayed into lending approval to measures they would otherwise reject. But the ambiguities that affected the idea of democracy spilled over into thought about the proper activities of government; supporters of the 'first-order' and 'second-order' ideas of government would necessarily understand different things by 'democracy'.

There is correspondence between Oakeshott and Hayek on the subject of these contrary ideas of government in modern European history,[18] perhaps unsurprisingly, for Hayek was a thinker with whom Oakeshott was often compared in his own lifetime. Contemporaries rightly observed the opposition of both men to the vogue for post-war planning. Those who read their more philosophical works would also have observed that both placed were sensitive to the importance of the past in political culture. Oakeshott's report on *The Constitution of Liberty* praised Hayek's 'care, originality, and profundity', and had no reservations in recommending it for publication. Hayek himself described the book as a restatement of Whig doctrine, and whatever Oakeshott may have thought of the Whig view of the historical past, he was prepared to acknowledge Whiggism as 'one of the most notable idioms of European political experience and reflection'. He also seems to have regarded it as synonymous with 'liberal' and even 'libertarian' thought, and this short report tends to confirm that he thought of 'true' liberalism, for want of a better term, in a manner similar to Hayek, as a commitment to the rule of law.

Oakeshott's praise of Hannah Arendt was perhaps a little more qualified. He recognised that she was interested in many of the same questions, but regarded her handling of 'the crisis of our time' in *Between Past and Future* as 'guilty of some exaggeration'. Arendt claimed, for example, that over the last four centuries there had developed 'an alienation of ourselves from the world which we have made for ourselves'. This included a 'detachment from our past' (which in Oakeshott's terms meant, of course, a change in our attitude to the practical past, the disappearance of our sense of tradition and our culture's sense of its own heritage). Other significant manifestations of this tendency were 'the desuetude of the notion of political authority and…the confusion of our thoughts about human freedom, about the education of children, and about culture'.

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[18] Oakeshott to F.A. Hayek, 19 January and 30 April 1968, Hoover Institution, Stanford, California.

Arendt's subject led her back, like Voegelin, to 'the Greco-Roman-Christian sources of our culture', but when it came to explaining how exactly we had lost our sense of tradition, Oakeshott found her account lacking. 'Writing at this level of generalisation the peaks are apt to appear higher and the valleys deeper than they are', he observed. It is only fair to remark that this problem affected his own writings on the history of European political thought, which though stimulating, were still highly compressed. The dynamic tension between two contrasting forms of government which Oakeshott emphasised in his later writings was always in danger of degenerating into a quasi-Manichean tale of a conflict between the darkness and the light, making use of the same simplistic dualism that both he and Voegelin had criticised in Gnosticism.

Equally, it would be unfair to deny that Oakeshott's later work strove for the precision lacking in the essays of *Rationalism in Politics*. This effort at clarity often produced a sparser and forbidding style, well exemplified by 'What is Political Theory?' This essay, which provides a more detailed examination of the ancient Greek vocabulary of theorising employed in the first essay of *On Human Conduct*,[19] approaches the question by distinguishing firmly between the activity of theorizing and its results. The activity itself is closely related to learning; it is described as an 'urge to inhabit a more intelligible or less mysterious world.' Oakeshott insisted that the thing to be explained, the *thea* as originally identified, must still be recognizable in the explanation, the *theorema* which provides the enhanced understanding. This is a restatement in more general terms of the argument in the essay on Carr's *What is History* that a hypothesis is tied to the nature of the subject being studied. We cannot, in other words, explain whatever it is we are interested in simply by explaining it away.

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[19] *On Human Conduct*, p. 3 n.

Even if we remain faithful to the nature of our subject-matter, however, we will almost certainly find that the enhanced understanding generated by our enquiry is itself open to question. At this point we have a number of choices. We may arbitrarily decide to arrest our enquiry at the stage it has reached, acknowledging that 'it rests upon certain conditions or assumptions', but that it is nevertheless adequate for the purpose. Readers of *Experience and its Modes* will remember that Oakeshott wrote there of the various modes of understanding as 'arrests' in the flow of experience, and in this later paper he again defined such 'modes' as 'systematic' arrests which accept and use, rather than query, their conditions of understanding.

Science, for example, was 'the determination to understand everything and anything in terms of settled scales of measurement, in terms of quantities', history the determination to understand past events in terms of their own past. In Oakeshott's later work, if the interpretation we have been advancing is correct, it was a contingency rather than a defect that some choose to make use of, for example, a sociological or chemical mode of understanding instead of a philosophical one. Despite the presence of the vocabulary of 'arrests', there was no longer any suggestion that other forms of understanding were less satisfactory than philosophy, as there had been in the 1920s and 1930s. It is true that he still described the questioning of the pure theorist as in principle 'unconditional'. It is important to realise, however, that it was no longer the conclusions of philosophy that Oakeshott saw as unconditional, as he had in his youth. Rather, he now regarded the unconditionality of philosophy as due to its absolute refusal ever to accept its own conclusions as final.

This interpretation is reinforced by Oakeshott's argument that political theory was itself a conditional platform of understanding, and not some *ne plus ultra* of enquiry. It was not even a systematic arrest in understanding like history or science, for 'politics' simply denoted a particular activity, and the facts of experience to which the term pointed could be studied by a variety of modes or disciplines. The distinctively philosophical or theoretical approach to politics, however, involved the kind of enquiry into the postulates of politics that Oakeshott pursued in 'On the Civil Condition'.[20] These were said to include, *inter alia*, *cives* or a group of legally related *personae*, and an authoritative process of law- or rule-making, during which the desirability or otherwise of the rules to which *cives* were to be obligated was debated. 'Politics', at least as understood by the 'second order' concept of government, was put firmly in its place as simply a means of maintaining the civil condition.

The style of the essay on 'Law', like that of 'What is Political Theory?', marks it as unmistakably a product of the final phase of Oakeshott's political thought. It restates concisely the concept of law implied by the understanding of government as adjudication offered in 'The Idea of "Character" in the Interpretation of Modern Politics'. In this understanding of government, the *persona* belonging to the inhabitants of a state, as such, is a legal identity. No citizen, as such, is distinguishable from any other, and the relationships between citizens take the form of authoritative legal rules. Inevitably, the people bearing these *personae* will have many other kinds of relationships to one another - familial, economic, affective, and so on. Indeed, the legal rules which join them as citizens assume this to be the case. These rules are 'procedural and constitute a "practice" of moral (that is, non-instrumental and non-prudential) qualifications to be taken account of and observed in considering and determining what shall be done or said'. They aim to qualify the otherwise unrestrained exercise of power in the pursuit of private interest by obliging those subject to them to observe certain ways of doing things.

Contra Hobbes and legal positivism, laws are not, in this ideal model, identical with commands. A law does not tell one to do something, but only prescribes certain conditions (or 'adverbial qualifications', as Oakeshott called them) to be observed in doing it. So, the law does not require me to have a car, or tell me where to drive it. If I do drive one, though, I must do so on the same side of the road as others, and not too quickly. In the real world, of course, laws, commands, injunctions, and so on, are all enacted as legislation. Oakeshott was quite clear that a state conceived of purely as an association in terms of legal rules 'has never in fact existed and…could never subsist without qualification.' A foreign policy would be impossible for such a state, and the executive apparatus which frequently issues the injunctions, commands, and so on required to enforce the rules would be unable to exist in the absence of statutory provision for taxes that did not qualify as laws in the strict sense. In actual states, purely rule-governed legal association is always qualified by certain 'necessary' and even 'desirable' statutory and judicial instruments of other kinds.

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[20] See 'On the Civil Condition', in *On Human Conduct*, pp. 108–84.

By contrast, the 'first-order' concept of government – which Oakeshott called 'enterprise association' in the essay 'On the Civil Condition' in *On Human Conduct* – did think of rules as commands requiring 'specific substantive responses'. Where the state is devoted to the pursuit of a particular purpose, the rules it makes are designed to promote its achievement. They may even extend to prescribing the motives of actions, something unknown to the 'second-order' conception. Citizens may become liable to be punished for showing insufficient devotion and enthusiasm, and so on. As we saw, Oakeshott believed that this understanding of government had been shared by all twentieth century totalitarian régimes, National Socialist, Fascist, and Communist alike. The essays in this collection thus reinforce one of his firmest conclusions, that to impose the character of a collective enterprise upon the state was to put an end to the rule of law, the sole guarantor of the only kind of political 'freedom' worth having.

4. *Education*

Oakeshott also disliked the tendency to see the state as an enterprise association because of the effect he believed it was having on education. In 'On arriving at a University', he explicitly warned his students against the 'propaganda... designed to make you believe that you are here to learn how to be a more efficient cog in a social machine'. Universities were not suitable to be assessed in terms of their contribution to national productivity. They were natural homes of 'play' in the extended sense discussed above, offering a chance to become educated in the sense of being acquainted with the 'theoretical' voices (here called the 'academic attitude') vital to civilized life because of the escape they offered from the frustrations inherent in viewing the world as simply material to be exploited. Even economics, so often treated as simply a tool of practical policy, was presented by Oakeshott as 'a world of explanatory, not practical, ideas'. Although it is a world of ideas to which we may turn when we are in the position of having to make a choice between different courses of action, it is not itself 'knowing what to do', something that rational choice theorists, for example, are still prone to forget.

'The Character of a University Education' covers the topic of teaching and learning in more depth. It begins with the argument that learning is intelligent conduct, and not mere conditioned behaviour. To learn, on Oakeshott's view, is comparable to entering into an inheritance, except that the inheritance here is ultimately composed of the sum total of human achievement, equating to what Oakeshott elsewhere called the 'myth' or 'collective dream' of a society. Of course, no individual ever masters more than a fraction of this notional whole, beginning as one must with what is closest in terms of language, feelings, beliefs, practices, and so on. There is, however, 'nothing else to be learned', nothing to be mastered other than the varied expressions of the thoughts and deeds of other human beings.

The activity of learning takes place at a variety of levels. So, on the one hand, university students ought already to be advanced learners. But, on the other hand, university education by no means marks the end of the learning process, which in fact continues until death. Nevertheless, there is something unique about university education, namely the emphasis on the pursuit of understanding for its own sake. Any teacher worthy of the name is engaged in 'the deliberate and intentional initiation of a pupil into the world of human achievement, or into some part of it'. A university teacher, however, is distinguished from teachers of other kinds by the absence of emphasis on the acquisition of practical skills necessary, for example, to the exercise of a trade or profession. Thus, the study of medicine, law, or engineering in a university ought not (insofar as it remains genuine university study) to be directed simply at producing doctors, lawyers, or engineers. This is even more the case with studies such as physics, history, literature, and languages, where the vast majority of students have no intention of devoting their lives to such academic studies. The purpose of universities, rather, is to give the ordinary person an appreciation of what it is to think in theoretical terms, and in doing so, add something of enduring value to their lives. As these essays illustrate, it was a purpose in which Oakeshott believed wholeheartedly, and in which he participated fully.

A Note on the Texts

The aim was to include as much material in the LSE archive as possible. However, certain items of considerable interest, such as 'A Discussion of Some Matters Preliminary to the Study of Political Philosophy' (LSE 1/1/3) and a set of lectures from the early 1930s on 'The Philosophical Approach to Politics' (LSE 1/1/7) were ruled out as simply too long. Others were rejected as juvenilia ('Lord Strafford', LSE 1/1/1), as unsuccessful by Oakeshott's own standards ('A Declaration of War', LSE 1/1/8), and, finally, as unlikely to have been written by Oakeshott at all ('Political Maturity', LSE 1/1/41).[21]

In keeping with the earlier edited collections of Oakeshott's writings, it was quickly resolved simply to make the texts publicly available, and not to attempt a fully annotated critical edition. The majority of the pieces in this volume presented few editorial difficulties, as in most cases full and finished texts were available. Transcription was generally unproblematic; some of the MSS were in manuscript, others in typescript, but Oakeshott's handwriting remained good throughout his life, and the intentions of his amendments were usually unmistakable.

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[21] The theme and content of this unsigned piece, which discusses the practical conditions necessary for democracy, are unusual for Oakeshott, and it contains references to Eastern Europe that have a ring of personal experience about them but do not fit Oakeshott's biography. It also bears corrections in a hand almost certainly not Oakeshott's. Despite an internet appeal for more information kindly organised by Mr Leslie Marsh of the Michael Oakeshott Association, no evidence has yet emerged to authenticate it, and after discussions with Mr Ivo Mosley, Dr Robert Grant, and Professor Geoffrey Thomas, it was therefore excluded — though if it is indeed not by Oakeshott, the interesting questions of who did write it, and how it found its way into his papers, remain unanswered.

The general layout of Oakeshott's original MSS has been retained as far as was consistent with typographical convention. So, for example, in the long essay 'On the Relations of Philosophy, Poetry, and Reality', Oakeshott's marginal headings have been reproduced as they appear in the original typescript. Where Oakeshott used section numberings, these have also been retained throughout. Obvious mistakes in punctuation, spelling, and grammar have been silently corrected. Abbreviations have also been expanded, so that, for example, 'xvii century' becomes 'seventeenth century'. Ampersands have been replaced by 'and', superscripting has been ignored, and underlining has been replaced by italics. Where Oakeshott identified passages from other works that were explicitly intended for quotation, as in the earlier of the two essays entitled 'The Philosophy of History', these have been inserted, and noted. Double quotation marks have been replaced with single quotation marks except for quotations within quotations. Unconventional capitalisation has been allowed to stand where it appears to have been deliberate. No attempt has been made to translate quotations, though words and phrases in languages other than English have been placed in italics to make them stand out in the text. Greek words have been rendered in both the Greek and Roman alphabets, depending on the form in which they were given in the original.

Oakeshott was very inconsistent in matters such as citation of sources, and it seemed reasonable to assume he would have done something to alleviate this in a published work. In his footnotes, therefore, very truncated references have been expanded, and full stops replaced with commas where these are more usual. So, for example, 'Spinoza. De. Int. Em. §30' becomes 'Spinoza, *De Intellectus Emendatione*, § 30'. Oakeshott's own footnotes and the small number of editorial notes have been kept separate, with the latter appearing as endnotes. These are mainly restricted to giving the reference to the MS in the LSE catalogue, and to noting significant deletions or insertions, marked by square brackets. In the few cases in which it proved impossible to see exactly where Oakeshott meant to place corrections, additions, and so on, they have been inserted amongst his footnotes.

In general, after sometimes sketching out a plan and collecting materials in his notebooks, Oakeshott seems either to have composed extensively in his head, or to have destroyed any very early rough drafts, as his scripts are usually continuous. He did not, however, always sign or date them, and in several cases a suitable title had to be supplied.[22] Occasionally one encounters longer and shorter versions, as, for example, with the review of *The Whig Interpretation of History*. Here the longer version has been reproduced, and passages of interest in the shorter version which were omitted from the longer piece have been inserted. Some sections omitted from the photocopy presumably intended as the final version of 'Political Thought as a Subject of Historical Enquiry' but present in two earlier drafts, one undated, the other dated '1979-80', have also been incorporated.

The single most problematic essay was 'The Emergence of the History of Thought'. The folder in the LSE collection contains no less than five papers with this heading. It includes two complete drafts of an early version, marked 'A' and 'B' respectively, which vary slightly but follow more or less the same plan. Then there is a complete draft of what seems to be a revised version, and what appear to be two incomplete drafts of a final version, one corrected, the other a clean copy. The version printed here has been constructed by appending the second half of the revised version to the clean copy of the incomplete text. A note has been added to indicate where the one ends and the other begins. No doubt this is not how Oakeshott would ideally have wished it to appear, but the resulting text at least reads smoothly. Since it constitutes his longest discussion of historiography, or the history of historical writing, it seemed worth committing some minor editorial violence in order to place it on the record.

The papers have been printed with a numerical header rather than as 'chapters', partly to emphasise that this book was never composed as a continuous work, and partly because some were so short that they were better thought of as simply 'sections'. Unfortunately, with some, the date of composition is uncertain.[23] Their style and content provide a number of clues, as do the presence of certain phrases that recur elsewhere, but decisive corroborating evidence has nevertheless been lacking for several of them, despite examination of sources such as the LSE annual calendar, student newspaper, and magazine. It may be, however, that further work on the notebooks will furnish more accurate dates than those given here.

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[22] Titles were required for 'History is a Fable', 'On Peace with Germany', 'Freedom and Power', 'The Character of a University Education', and 'What is Political Theory?'. The first page of 'On Peace with Germany' was also missing, though Oakeshott's corrections suggest he may have deliberately removed it.

In an attempt to maximize the utility of the volume, the editor has supplied three separate indexes. The subject index hopefully gathers together the more significant usages of key terms in Oakeshott's writings, while acknowledging their meanings. For example, the entries for 'history' take account of whether Oakeshott had in mind the discipline, or the events of the past. Similarly, the entries for 'law' have been subdivided into 'natural and scientific' and 'positive'. Otherwise, however, synonyms and cognate terms have generally been grouped together, so that, for example, readers seeking references to 'philosophers' or 'poets' should look under 'philosophy' and 'poetry'. The name index tries to include all mentions of names of persons or places, with the exception of fictional characters. Finally, the index of works aims to list all references to books, plays, and poems in Oakeshott's text and notes. No attempt has been made to supply full bibliographical details, as in most cases it would have been impossible to determine which edition of a work Oakeshott was using; the aim has simply been to enable the reader to determine whether or not a particular work is mentioned in the volume. Where it has not been possible to identify the author or work with certainty, the entry is followed by a question mark. For any errors and shortcomings in the indexes, or for that matter in the rest of the volume, the editor is solely responsible.

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[23] The essays not dated precisely are 'The Voice of Conversation in the Education of Mankind', 'Freedom and Power', 'Conduct And Ideology In Politics', 'The Idea of "Character" In The Interpretation of Modern Politics', 'Current Ideas About Government', 'Work and Play', 'The Character of a University Education', and 'What Is Political Theory?'

One

History is a Fable

History is a fable which men agree to believe.
Napoleon

All truth is a shadow, except final truth. But every truth is substance in its own place.
Izaac Pennington

There is a branch of study, which goes by the name of Historiography, which makes it its business to examine the methods of research employed by Historians, and in the end to deduce some general principles about the writing of history. In the world of science investigation of a sort was carried on for centuries before anyone thought fit to speculate upon the aim and scope of the 'scientific method' – as it has come to be called. That is to say, the method was evolved in practice before men studied it for its own sake. And yet no one can deny that this study gave an impetus and an accuracy to the scientific method which formerly it lacked. History is in a similar case; except that its method has not as yet received that attention which for long has been given to science. Historiography is a comparatively young study, and consequently one looked upon with some suspicion by professional historians – especially in England. 'Why can't you write *history*, instead of writing about history?' they ask, and are apt to be impatient of those, perhaps naïve, gentlemen who prefer to consider the question whether it is possible to write history at all.

But perhaps I had better make a clean breast of it at once, and say that it is a problem in historiography to which I wish to call your attention to-night. But do not alarm yourselves unnecessarily. This is a subject which, judged by what standard you like, is not without some *use*. [– a consideration, I must admit, which does not weigh very heavily with me.][ii] A celebrated French historian has said that 'the truth is, that, of all branches of study, history is without a doubt the one in which it is most necessary for students to have a clear consciousness of the methods they use.'[1] So, we shall not I hope be wasting our time in studying this subject. Historians have too long been content to say that they are scientists or artists or a mixture of both and leave the study of their method at that. But the fact is, and we shall return to this later, the method of history differs fundamentally from both that of science and that of art, and we shall only understand it properly when we call it 'the historic method' and study it independently of science and of art.

I cannot claim any great originality for what I have to say; men of considerable reputation have treated this subject – 'The meaning of Truth in History' – before; but, as the Greek sage has it, 'What is right may well be said – even twice.'[2] I am aware, also, of the extreme difficult of listening to an abstract argument without any opportunity of studying the actual written word, so I shall endeavour to illustrate my arguments, abhor abstractions and cleave to facts as much as possible.

Let us turn, then, to our own subject. But first, What is History? And this I think we may answer in a manner which will admit of little controversy. History has two main elements – (i) Events in time, and (ii) the recollection of these events in the mind. Both of these are, I think, essential. There can, of course, be little doubt that events apart from the historian do exist. The Constitution of England evolved without the episcopal assistance of Stubbs; the Roman Empire declined and fell before Gibbon was thought of, and, in the same way, the Dutch Republic 'rose' and became independent without the necessary co-operation of John Lathrop Motley. But I think it is fair to say that these events are not historical events until they have been recollected in the mind of an historian. This double origin of history is admitted in the way in which we ordinarily speak of it. History, so far as we are concerned, is written history. But *how* is history written?

Not many years ago the two heads of the history school of the Sorbonne – M. Langlois and M. Seignobos – wrote a book with a view to instructing would-be historians in the rudiments of their science. The book concludes with some general considerations. 'History,' it says, 'is only the utilization of documents. But it is a matter of chance whether documents are preserved or lost. Hence the predominant part played by chance, in the formation of history.'[3] 'Conceivably,' it continues, 'a day may come, when, thanks to the organization of labour, all existing documents will have been discovered, emended, arranged, and all the facts established of which traces have not been destroyed. When that day comes history will be established.'[4] Now, the theory here put forward is that history is simply the *recalling* of past facts. The Historian is receptive only. He has no task of construction. Accuracy, given a mind reasonably acute, depends entirely upon documentary evidence. And, some day, all that is knowable of the past will be known. That this is a false and impossible view of the nature of history I wish to try and prove to-night.

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[1] Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction to the Study of History*, p. 8 (Eng. Trans.)

[2] Empedocles, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. H. Diels, 25.

History, we have seen, stands for both the past fact and the present record. The truth of the record depends entirely upon the truth of the past fact. That is to say that history can be a true record of actual fact only if it is possible for the human mind to observe and record facts in the manner in which they actually take place. Fact, then, is the basis of history. But how do we approach a fact?

The view that history is simply the recalling of a past event is untenable for two reasons. First, because we nowhere find facts in so simple a state as can warrant us to take them as the only truth. Conflicting facts arise; and we are forced to choose. History is necessarily a matter of selecting and rejecting, of weighing and balancing. Documents have very different values, and in order to advance at all history must be critical. But the second reason is far more fundamental. It is this. While facts are outward, permanent, and accessible to all men, to the human mind they involve judgments. All evidence rests in the end upon an inference. A bare fact, the simple sensation, cannot be recalled without a judgment. Impartiality in the sense of mere passivity is a thing for ever impossible. And not only do we as individuals observe facts differently from each other, but also each age, each civilization, has a point of view which it cannot discard try as it will. This difficulty does not assail us only when we are dealing with events which have taken place so long ago that all record of them is shrouded in obscurity; it is present also in the observation of things which happen before our eyes. Let me give a few illustrations of this point. What I am asking you to do is to observe the manner in which you come to know any new fact.

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[3] Langlois and Seignobos, op. cit., p. 316.

[4] ibid., p. 318.

Here is a simple example. It is a fact of the experience of everyone that we cannot look for anything which we should not recognize if we saw it. Imagine a game of hunt-the-thimble played by people who had no idea of what a thimble looked like. Could it ever come to an end? In these circumstances it is easy to understand the saying of Robert Browning that 'tis the taught already that profits by teaching.'[5] And the truth comes home to us of that remark by one of William De Morgan's Characters – 'If you'd a knowed 'em when you seed 'em, you might have kep' your eyes open and took note.'[6] Or take this confession of Walter Pater. 'A book, like a person, has its fortunes with one; is lucky or unlucky in the precise moment of its falling in our way, and often by some happy accident counts with us for something more than its independent value.'[7] I remember seeing the proud claim of an elementary schoolmaster, who had opened a library for his children, that the favourite reading of those between the ages of nine and twelve was Mr de Gibbins' 'Economic History of England.' He did not seem to realize that it was possible to read a book without understanding a word of it, and that this is what children are extremely fond of doing. All of us have experienced that amazement, on rereading a book, at things we had missed on our first reading, from lack of understanding. And why did we fail to understand? The facts were there in black and white; is there anything required beyond an ability simply to read? Yes; the fact is that everything we read or observe depends for its meaning upon the present state of our knowledge, as much as upon the thing itself. Shakespeare has remarked that –

> A jests prosperity lies in the ear
> Of him that hears it, never on the tongue
> Of him that makes it.

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[5] 'Christmas Day'.

[6] William De Morgan, *It Never Can Happen Again*, Ch. XXI.

[7] *Marius the Epicurean*, i. 93.

And this is true of more than pleasantries. The prosperity of all that is ever said or written rests with the hearer or reader more than with the speaker or writer. The mind of the hearer gives colour, and form and life itself, to the word, shaping it into significance after its own fashion and interpreting it to its own experience.

Here is another instance. It comes from Thackeray's novel *Vanity Fair*. Joseph Sedley is just back from India and Rebecca Sharp is desirous of appearing interested in that country. They sit down to dinner and Joseph is served with some Indian curry.

> 'What is it?' said she, turning an appealing look to Mr. Joseph. 'Capital, said he. His mouth was full of it: his face quite red with the delightful exercise of gobbling. 'Mother, it's as good as my own curries in India.' 'Oh, I must try some, if it is an Indian dish,' said Miss Rebecca. 'I am sure everything must be good that comes from there.' 'Give Miss Sharp some curry, my dear,' said Mr. Sedley, laughing. Rebecca had never tasted the dish before. 'Do you find it as good as everything else from India?' said Mr. Sedley. 'Oh, excellent!' said Rebecca, who was suffering tortures with the cayenne pepper. 'Try a chili with it, Miss Sharp,' said Joseph, really interested. 'A chili,' said Rebecca, gasping. 'Oh yes!' She thought a chili was something cool, as its name imported, and was served with some. 'How fresh and green they look,' she said, and put one into her mouth. It was hotter than the curry; flesh and blood could bear it no longer. She laid down her fork. 'Water, for Heaven's sake, water!' she cried.[iii]

What I want to make clear is that even language itself is powerless to convey a meaning to those who do not already understand. Words have a meaning for us – or no meaning – in proportion to what we already know as well as in proportion to the 'sense that they make', as we say.

My meaning, I think, must by this time be fairly clear, but I cannot resist one more illustration. It is concerned with the matter of indexes in books. Putting aside those books which have no indexes, which I am always tempted to throw out of the window, we find many degrees of goodness and badness in indexes; and the best index – I talk of what is known as a subject index – is that which looks at a subject from every conceivable point of view, simply because our individual points of view differ so widely that an index which is of use to one man of a particular way of thinking and classifying his knowledge is perfectly useless to another man whose mind works differently. As an example of a peculiar type of mind in this matter we may take that of the man who compiled the index to some law reports in which if you looked up 'Mind' you were referred to page 300 and there found the entry 'Mr Justice Darling said he had a good mind to commit the witness for contempt of court'!

But what is the outcome of all this? It is that each individual when presented with fact – whether in record or in actual life – looks at it in a different way, would describe it from a different point of view, would select different features for emphasis until it makes us dizzy to compare them all, – and even our comparison of them would be carried out under the auspices of our own point of view. Not only, then, does the historian labour under a point of view which is probably antagonistic to the point of view of his sources – be they documents or living witnesses; but also those who originally observed the event – the eye-witnesses – had themselves to incorporate this new experience with the present content of their minds before it had any meaning at all for them.

The situation is rather black. History is beginning to look a little like a fable. 'But', you may say, 'you have given us plenty of examples, and yet none of them seem remotely connected with history.' Well, it is only possible to give an historic example where an actual mistake has been exposed and remedied and I will confine myself to a single instance of this.

> The Phoenicians sailed from the Red Sea into the southern ocean, and every autumn put in where they were on the Libyan coast, sowed a patch of ground, and waited for next year's harvest. Then, having got their grain, they put to sea again, and after two full years rounded the Pillars of Heracles in the course of the third, and returned to Egypt. These men made a statement which I do not myself believe, though others may, to the effect that as they sailed on a westerly course round the southern end of Libya, they had the sun on their right – to northward of them.[iv]

This voyage of the Phoenicians, so the commentators of Herodotus tell us, has been the subject of much controversy not only among classical scholars but also among the historians and geographers of a time more nearly contemporary with that of Herodotus himself. The arguments for and against the authenticity of the voyage are many, but strangely enough the one fact that has persuaded many scholars to accept it, is that about which Herodotus – though he records it – was so scornful. We now know that in sailing round Africa the travellers would as a matter of fact have the sun – not the sunrise – on their right hand, so long as they kept a more or less westward course. Herodotus did not know this. The state of his knowledge did not warrant him to accept the Phoenicians' story. His point of view – the necessary point of view of scientific opinion of his day – prevented him from understanding a story which we know must have been substantially correct. Historians of to-day would not have recorded so unlikely a story, and had Herodotus been more scientifically minded we might never have had this instance. One age can believe – scientifically – what another age cannot; and this is a law altogether independent of the testimony of witnesses.

The Historian, then, comes to examine his documents in the light of his own knowledge, and from the point of view of his own day. For not only do individuals differ very widely in their point of view, but also ages and civilizations possess peculiar characteristics of which they cannot rid themselves. An age which reads or writes history for guidance in practical life will find in it something different from that which looks simply for edification, or for disinterested knowledge. Just as the tinned-fish King who admitted he read his Carlyle because he found there some 'damned good adverts for sardines' – you will recall the picture in *Punch* – will find something other than he who seeks a philosophy of life from the same pages. As Goethe said – 'Every man hears only what he understands.'[8] To sum up the position we have reached. Try how we will we can never look at the past except through the spectacles of the present.

Our present knowledge gives us one view of the past, the knowledge of the next century will probably provide another. Truth in history does not depend entirely upon the mere accuracy of documentary evidence, but also upon the way in which that evidence is examined, the content of the mind which examines it. If, for instance, we would get at the

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[8] Goethe, *Maxims*, 383.

Middle Ages as they really were, we must discard the experience of the last 500 years and put ourselves into the position of a man who is ignorant of all the discoveries and ideas which have taken place and grown up in that intervening period, – a thing impossible to achieve. Those past ages possessed an atmosphere and were ruled by ideas which we can now but dimly understand.[9] They are to our minds something foreign, something new, something we have not as yet experienced. True, we may understand them in part, but they can never be our ideas and we can never understand them apart from the ideas which are our own.

When all the facts have been collected and all the evidence weighed, 'there still remains the ceaseless endeavour more and more thoroughly to apprehend the old material, the passion of the mind to be at home in its object, the longing to think the thing as it is in itself, and as all men have failed to think it before. With every fresh standing-ground gained by the growth of experience, with every rise of the spirit to a fuller life comes another view of the far-flung past from a higher and new level, and a fresh and corresponding change in the features of the object recognized.'[10] What is our usual method of getting to know something new, something of which we have no actual experience? If a man entirely ignorant of our civilization were to ask us to explain to him what a University is, how should we set about it? 'There is only one way of knowing. It consists in finding a place for new phenomena within our system of experience.'[11] To explain a thing to an ignorant man it is necessary to start with something he knows already and build upon that. We should tell him that a University was *like* something which he already understood. To an East Ender we might say it was like his social club. 'Oh', he might answer, 'a place where you can play billiards all day.' And it would be necessary to explain in what respects it was like and in what respect it was unlike his club. And so on. It is the process of analogy; and the human mind knows no other. All new knowledge depends upon our ability to find in our present knowledge an analogy for the new phenomenon.

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[9] Cf. Criticism of Gk drama – *Hibbert Journal* (January 1925).

[10] Bradley, 'Presuppositions of Critical History,' p. 4.

[11] Sir Henry Jones, *A Faith that Enquires*, p. 79.

There is a trick of logic, which dates back to the Greek Sophists, by which it is possible to make it appear that many may never gain new knowledge.[12] This is the argument. True knowledge must be founded upon a true analogy in our own experience. But a true analogy is a complete one. And it is obvious that we cannot have a complete analogy without at the same time possessing the knowledge which it is our object to obtain. And so the circle is closed. This is equivalent to saying that 'in order to work iron a hammer is needed, and in order to have a hammer it must be made, for which another hammer and other instruments are needed, for the making of which other things are needed; and in this manner anyone might vainly endeavour to prove that men have no power of working iron.'[13] The fact is a hammer has been made. We *can* come to know something of which we previously had no experience. But here the difference between Science and History is most fundamental. The Scientific method is the one by which we come to gain new knowledge. By experiment we gradually build up our knowledge, and advance from less true to more true – just as primitive man, by first using a stone to make a rudimentary hammer, and, in the course of generations, the rudimentary hammer to make a more refined tool, arrived in the end at the modern implement. For science there is an accumulative process in which every step is an advance; and our present knowledge is built upon the discoveries, superceded and again superceded, of past generations.

But this method is for ever barred to the historian. 'The original fact of history is (i) an event which perishes as it arises. It dies and can never be recalled. It cannot repeat itself, and we are powerless to repeat it. And in addition (ii) we cannot prepare for it.'[14] It is forbidden us to put our cameras in place ready to record the event when it happens. There can never be a science of history. The Scientific method is forbidden to the historian. He cannot gradually build up his knowledge from a true to a truer analogy and at last to the fact itself, for the fact, the event perished when it happened and we start and finish our researches with only the evidence of observers and the differing testimony of witnesses, that is, with theory and not with fact. And each new discovery cannot, as in the case of science, be said to contribute to one advance in knowledge, for each discovery is but the reaction of the records of history upon a different personal experience, a mind with a different content, and is not more likely to correspond with the fact than any other, previous or to come.

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[12] Plato, *Meno*, 80 e; *Euthydemus*, 275 d, 276 d; Aristotle, *De Sophisticis Elenchis*, c 4, 165 b. 30; Zeller, *Pre-Socratic Philosophy*, ii. 465.

[13] Spinoza, *De Intellectus Emendatione*, § 30.

[14] Bradley, op. cit., p. 35.

This dilemma is not, as some may think, entirely divorced from the actual writing of history. Historians, at one time and another, have faced the problem and have given various solutions, of which two are outstanding. They may be called the scientific and the artistic solutions. The Historian as scientist is apt to reject these considerations. To him 'History is the utilization of Documents.' 'When all the documents are known,' these are the words of M. Langlois, 'and have gone through the operations which fit them for use, the work of critical scholarship will be finished.'[15] We have already seen, I think, how this is merely a shirking of a very real dilemma. The Historian can call himself scientific in any true sense only if he ignores a large part of the essential nature of the thing with which he is dealing.

But the Poet-Historian offers another solution. 'I know,' he says, 'that it is logically impossible for me to look at the past with an absolutely open mind, for me to throw off the ideas and stand point which rule the present. But surely I can arrive at what the past really was by an act of intuition.' He faces the problem and produces a solution of a kind. But what is the value of the solution which he proposes? In the end it comes to this, that the poet-historian is banking on his own *genius*. 'Men of genius get their knowledge of the world nobody knows how; Shakespeare, for instance, cannot have had personal experience of more than a fraction of what he wrote about. In fact genius is the power of getting knowledge with the least possible experience, and one of the greatest differences between men is the amount of experience they need of a thing in order to understand it.'[16] Let me give a couple of simple instances of what I mean. Keats was no great Greek scholar and yet it is generally admitted that few have captured the spirit of Greek Civilization so wholly as he. And again; any who have read Shorthouse's novel *John Inglesant* will have been struck by the vividness of his descriptions of Italian scenery and life, and moreover those who know that country are struck by the extreme accuracy of these descriptions. And yet they were written by a man who never visited Italy. The best instance of an historian who avowedly, to a great extent, followed this method, is that afforded by Renan. This is what he says. 'There are hardly any certain facts (*détails*) in history; nevertheless facts have always some significance. The genius of the historian consists in making a true whole from incidents (*traits*) which are only half-true.'[17] It was his practice to question gently his documents and to *win* from them the truth – '*solliciter doucement les textes.*' Now, it seems to me a very different question to decide whether this method of writing history is valid. Croce compliments it by classing it among his 'pseudo-histories'.[18] We may say with certainty that it is dangerous, but, for all that, it may be our only chance of really coming to know the past as it actually was. But still, I think we are warranted of being a little suspicious of it – especially if any alternative solution to the problem presents itself.

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[15] Langlois and Seignobos, op. cit., p. 316.

[16] Nettleship, *Lectures on Plato's Republic*, pp. 128-9. (See *Republic*, 106. 22 *et seq.*)

We have now considered those who regard history as a science and seek to apply the 'scientific method' to it, and those who look upon it as an art, making free use of their imaginative and intuitive faculties in their research. But what if there is an 'historic method' different alike from both that of science and that of art? One thing is certain; the problem of how to get to know the past is peculiar to history and if it has not already done so it is time it began to evolve a method of its own. And as a matter of fact there is material for the formation of such a method. The past, we have seen, 'varies with the present and cannot do otherwise since it is always the present upon which it rests. The present is presupposed by it, and is its necessary preconception…There is no single history which is not so based, which does not derive its individual characters from the particular standpoint of the author'[19] and his age. It is only when the historian has become aware of these facts that he can become truly critical, and protect himself (so far as is possible) from the caprices of fiction. If he does this he must give up that hope, cherished by both the scientific and the artistic historians, of ever arriving at the absolute truth of the actual fact which took place, and must content himself with recording the past seen through the spectacles of the present. We know how much uninteresting has been recorded, and how many things which we should like to know are unrecorded. And this will always be so. We can never put ourselves in the position of men a century ahead, any more than we can ever understand men of an age gone by. Historical truth, then, is simply the truth about past events which satisfies our present state of knowledge. No deeper study of the past, after a time, will avail to reveal new facts, but the fresh experience of a future age will light up the past with a light which is not that of our own day, and will not be that of an age buried still further in the future. 'Dead history revives, and past history again becomes present, as the development of life demands them', says Croce. And again; 'These revivals have altogether interior motives, and no wealth of documents or narratives can bring them about.'[20] M. Langlois and M. Seignobos dream of a time when the last historian shall lay down his pen, and blot the last page of the last history. 'In the case of some ancient periods', they tell us, 'for which documents are rare, we can now see that in a generation or two it will be time to stop.'[21] Vain hope! History is not so easy a matter as that. When you once begin it is for ever impossible to end. In matters of history, as Loisy says, '*le dernier mot de la verité restera toujours à dire.*'

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[17] Renan, 'Préface', *Vie de Jésus.*

[18] Croce, *On History.*

[19] Bradley, op. cit., p. 15.

But having narrowed down the possibilities of history to this, we have not left the historian with any light task. His business is to read the past through the eyes of the present as accurately as possible. The real present to any man is his own personal experience, for, as we have seen, the testimony of others is not fact but theory; and so, if he is to have anything of value on which to base his recording of the past, it must be a personal, first-hand knowledge – a first-hand theory – of the present, its ideas, institutions, inventions, discoveries, of the whole sum of what we mean by civilization. A knowledge of this is not less necessary to the historian than an acquaintance of the records of the past, and an ability to gauge the value of different sources of information. Every man has his bias, his 'pet theories' and enthusiasms, but it is these which prevent him from grasping the present as it really is. The only sure foundation, in the present, on which to base a reading of the past, is a knowledge of the whole, a knowledge tested and examined and purified from all taint of national prejudice or social and economic bias. An historian must continually examine his own ideas, for if they be not as true as he can make them, an inaccuracy, which is not inherent in his subject, will creep into his work. If there is any true meaning for the term 'Science' when applied to history it is that we must be scientific in our treatment of the present, of our own ideas. Listen to the accusation of a great historian of the present time.

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[20] Croce, *On History*, pp. 24-5.

[21] op. cit., p. 316.

> Historical sense, in the full meaning of the term, implies a critical objectivity in the face of far-off and recent events alike. To keep this faculty free from the bias of opinions and interests when we are estimating facts is a power which even our historians do not possess. As long as they are dealing with a period so remote that it has no bearing on the present they are critical so far as the views of the school to which they belong allow it. But if the past stands in any real connection with 'to-day', we can perceive at once in their estimate the influence of their particular standpoint, rational, religious, social or economic.
>
> It is significant that while during the last few decades the learning of our historians has, no doubt, increased, their critical objectivity has not. Previous investigators kept this ideal before their eyes in much greater purity than have those of to-day; we have gone so far that we no longer seriously make the demand that in scientific dealings with the past there shall be a suppression of all prejudices which spring from nationality or creed. It is quite common nowadays to see the greatest learning bound up with the strongest bias. In our historical literature the highest positions are occupied by works written with propagandist aims.[v]

Critical vigilance is required in no small measure. It is not easy even to read the past through the eye of the present. Yet, regrettable as to some it may seem, history cannot reproduce the past as it was (that is, it cannot be a science), is not warranted to originate it afresh (that is, it cannot be an art) and finds in the place of what it regarded as a witness a writer of fiction, and in the place of its fact a theory; for the raw material of the historian is not fact, but theory. But I perceive at this point that I have become hopelessly heretical, and I wish that I could think that it was not only at this point that I had become hopelessly tedious.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[i] LSE 1/1/50. Autograph. The essay is undated, but the same folder contains an envelope addressed: 'Michael Oakeshott, Caius College, Cambridge', stamped 'BOW S.O.E / 12.15 pm 6 OC 23', on which Oakeshott wrote: ' "History is a fable men agree to believe" Napoleon'.

[ii] Deleted in MS.

[iii] The original MS reads '(read pp. 20 and 21. 'What is it?' to ' "Water" she cried')'. The relevant passage from Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, has been supplied.

[iv] The original MS reads 'Herodotus IV. 42'. The relevant passage from Herodotus, *Histories*, has been supplied.

[v] The original MS reads '(read Schweitzer pp. 44–45)'. Although Oakeshott did not identify the work in question, the discussion in A. Schweitzer, *The Decay and Reconstruction of Civilization*, tr. C.T. Campion, A. & C. Black, London, 1923, at pp. 44–5 appears to fit the context.

Two

The Cambridge School of Political Science

> Upon my word, said I, we are in a most foolish predicament.
>
> How so?
>
> Why, my good sir, it appears that what we are looking for has been all this time rolling before our feet, and we never saw it, but did the most ridiculous thing. Just as people at times go about looking for something which they hold in their hands, so we, instead of fixing our eyes upon the thing itself, kept gazing at some point in the distance, and this is probably why it eluded our search.
>
> Plato, *Republic,* 432 d.

> Discussion to-day is apt to lose precision by concentration on details. We fail too often, not only to see the wood for the trees, but the trees themselves, because of our undue attention to the bark, and even the bark itself, because of our concern over its specks.
>
> Lord Haldane.

1. In the following essay I have brought together some criticisms of the Cambridge school of Political Science which have occurred to me from time to time. These thoughts are the fruit of some reflection on the part of one who has followed the course prescribed by that school, a reflection not less upon the benefits derived, than upon what now appears in the nature of a short-coming. And if the greater part of what I have to say should seem to be to the discredit of the present syllabus it must be understood that I have not intended to give any account of the whole, but, rather, have fastened my attention on those parts and aspects which seem to call for reconsideration; its merits are evident enough to any who study under it. Nor would I have it imagined that

these remarks are aimed at anything or anybody other than the syllabus itself. To what extent the criticisms which follow are valid for the teaching of Political Science elsewhere than in Cambridge, and for much modern writing on the subject, does not here concern me, but it appears that Cambridge follows what I take to be the prevailing school of political thought to-day, which school, in many of its teachings, I believe to be pernicious. In my remarks I shall endeavour to adhere to the following order. First, a short description of the Syllabus, together with a criticism of some minor points. Secondly, an account of the conception of political science implied in the syllabus, detailing its specific shortcomings. Thirdly, a view of what I take to be a more proper conception of the science. And lastly, the construction of a syllabus aimed to embody this conception.

I am aware that a complete treatment of the subject upon which I now embark would necessitate a deep enquiry into matters which can hardly be so much as mentioned, but, to make my position as clear as possible, I am not concerned to introduce into our Cambridge studies a bias of any particular school of thought; my sole purpose is to arrive at some clear idea of the nature of political science and the best method of studying it.

2. In the Historical Tripos[1] the Political Science course is divided into two sections, one of which (A) is placed among the subjects to be studied in the first part of the Tripos, the other (B) in the second part. The two sections are, presumably, planned to bear some relation to one another – B assuming a certain knowledge of the ground covered by A – but, in view of the fact that many undergraduates take Part II of the Tripos without taking Part I, it is clear that much of the overlapping conspicuous in the syllabus is more than excusable. It is clear also that could we arrive at some plan by which the two sections should bear an intimate relation to one another and yet at the same time each be sufficiently different to avoid overlapping and to form a whole in itself, we should have achieved something of what is required. Nor must we

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[1] I confine my attention to the syllabus of the Board of Historical Studies, it being the only one of which I have any first-hand experience, though most of the criticisms will (I believe) apply equally to the course prescribed under the Tripos in Political Economy.

leave out of account the other subjects of the Historical Tripos studied by those who follow the Political Science course, but aim at making as complete and consistent a whole as possible. But to this I shall return later.

On page 391 of the current edition of the Student's Handbook we read:-

> Political science shall be understood to mean a comparative study of political institutions and their development, with some reference to the history of Political Theory and the definition of political terms. It shall be studied mainly in relation to the ancient city-state and the modern nation-state.

And there is appended a significant list of books for study and reference. Were this the only datum we had to go upon there would be no little difficulty in determining the precise form which the course might take, but there are in addition, not only the lectures – for which I suppose there is no necessity of strictly adhering to the syllabus – but the examination papers themselves; and so we are tolerably well informed from what may be called official sources.

But, to come to grips with the facts of the case, I can remember that I looked forward with some eagerness to these lectures on political science, for I desired to know what I ought to think about our life as human beings in society, but instead of any satisfaction, however momentary, of these questionings, what stands out in my mind is rather a series of the bitterest disappointments. After a few minutes of introduction, the lectures, through no fault of the lecturer, passed quickly to the study of the origins of human society and the outward forms of government organization; and the glories of the historical method were detailed to us, together with some account of the social organization of the Hottentots and Melanesians. As time went on it seemed likely that we might soon arrive at what I took to be the proper subject of political science, and one day I heard the name of Plato mentioned. But it was soon over; we were told that his point of view was 'Whig' and that he was a Puritan; and then found ourselves in company with Aristotle. I can remember, too, coming to a lecture from reading the essay in *Hellenica* by A.C. Bradley, I had hoped to hear more about this that seemed to be the root of the matter, but my hopes were rudely shattered. Aristotle's brief hour had passed, and we found ourselves discussing the power of the Plebs in the Rome of 367 B.C. So, also, at a later date when the much abused Rousseau was mentioned, I came to the lecture desiring some guidance in the maze of the *Contrat Social*, but was put off with the difference of the internal organization between the states of the South and those of the Middle West of the U.S.A., and some statistics about Proportional Representation. So great was my disappointment at the time that I did know whether to regard myself as the victim of a carefully planned swindle, or whether I ought quickly to revise my innocent notions of the nature of political science. But I soon learnt that what I might expect from Political Science A. was nothing more or less than 'a comparative survey of Political Institutions' with the briefest possible reference – not even amounting to an outline history – to Man's great struggle to think rightly about his relation to his fellow creatures. The course led us through the political history of ancient Greece and Rome, Mediaeval Europe, Renaissance Italy, to the Europe of to-day. It paid great attention to the English Constitution and the organization of the British Empire; and I can remember an effort to get by heart the numbers in the different Parliaments, Senates, National Councils, Congresses, Chambers of Deputies, Houses of Assembly, Federal Councils, and Federal Tribunals of the world. The names of Plato and Aristotle, Dante, Aquinas, Marsilius of Padua, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Montesquieu, Locke and Rousseau were mentioned; I do not recollect catching any others. Of Saint Paul, perhaps the greatest political philosopher, of Spinoza and Berkeley, two of the most illuminating writers on the subject, and of many others equally great, the syllabus had not heard. As to any discussion of what an institution, any institution, is and means, we were left wholly to our own conjectures.

With regard to the definition of political terms, one might have imagined that the word 'State' called for some brief treatment, but the lecturer (bravely following the syllabus which relegates to Political Science B. all discussion of the nature and end of the State, apparently thinking it possible to give a definition in terms other than these) saw fit to disregard the possibility that any difficulty might arise over the true meaning of the word, whereas the fact is that the whole of political science is involved in this question 'What is the

State?'[2] As to the definitions given (to which we shall return later), they seemed scientific (that is, arbitrary) enough, conveying no smallest inkling of the *meaning* of the institutions defined. One is reminded of Molière's Bachelierus who, when asked the reason why opium produces sleep, answers –

Quia est in eo
Virtus dormitiva
Cujus est natura
Sensus assoupire.

With regard to Political Science B., we read that it 'shall be understood to include the following subjects of study:

> 1. The nature and end of the State and the grounds of political obligation.
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> 2. The structure and function of government with special reference to the requirements of the Modern State.'

This section takes up the history of political theory at Rousseau and examines some of the writings of Bentham, Mill, Hegel, Green, Bosanquet and Hobhouse, to which is given about a third of the lectures and the examination paper. The rest is concerned with more detailed accounts of the organization of government, especially of the Party system in England, together with further discussions of such questions as the Sovereignty of Parliament, and the origin of the House of Lords, most of which had received full treatment both in 'Political Science A' and in the 'Later Constitutional History of England.'[3] One would suppose that the question of the nature and end of the State was first seriously attacked at the beginning of the nineteenth century whereas the fact is that it was fully discussed by Socrates and in these latter days has almost entirely dropped out of the consideration of political theorists in favour of discussions as to the place of the Press in modern civilization, whether the Crown should be liable for Torts, the social organization of the Hawaiian Islands, and similar questions of form and origin. However, Political Science B. does seem to touch, though very inadequately, the real subject of study; but in so doing it confuses its terms, places its emphasis, and proportions its attention in such a way as to leave a wholly wrong impression.

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[2] Compare Aristotle, *Politics*, III. i. 1.

[3] Both subjects of study in Part I of the Tripos.

3. In turning to describe this impression in detail, it is necessary to make a short digression in order to discuss the meaning of the word 'science' in this context. The Cambridge School of Political Science grew up, I suppose, mainly under the influence of Seeley who (in common with many of his time) had certain definite views on the use of the word in conjunction with politics. He speaks of a 'purely inductive science' having for its subject-matter the facts of history, thinking that history is simply a mass of facts out of which a science of political facts arises. Now this is not only fallacious, but also unscientific. First, there is not and never could be a 'purely inductive science'. And secondly, though it is often thought that to be scientific it is necessary to employ the particular methods of one or other of the 'exact sciences', the only really scientific procedure is to employ a method appropriate to the subject-matter of your study. A botanist in studying the structure of a leaf may find it useful to cut a cross section in order to complete his examination, but if he try with knife and microscope to identify the chlorophyll he would be acting in a manner the very reverse of scientific. Similarly, the knife may reveal a human appendix, but we should consider him a very dangerous and unscientific man who went about to discover the human soul in the same way. For a scientific treatment of politics, then, we require a method appropriate to its subject-matter, and this is exactly what a purely inductive method is not. But rightly to call any study a science it must respond to a more delicate test than this, for art itself might well come under this definition. Maitland, in his essay on 'The Body Politic',[4] has already detailed these tests and, subjecting politics to their standard, has shewn how inaccurate it is to speak of political science in this sense, and I do not intend to recapitulate his course of reasoning.

Suffice it to say that it is admitted by all the best writers who use the term 'political science' that the only applicable meaning of 'science' is that 'there is a science of politics in the same sense, and to the same, or about the same extent, as there is a science of morals.'[5] That is to say, Political Science and Political Philosophy either mean the same thing or the term science has, in this connection, no valuable meaning at all. Political Science is, then, a 'moral' science and not a 'natural' science. In view of this fact, it may appear difficult to some to understand on what grounds the Cambridge Syllabus goes under the name of political science, and I think their sense of difficulty has every possible justification. It would, indeed, be a matter of no small wonder to us, did we not possess the writings of Seeley and others, how a course which purports to deal with the comparative history of institutions and with not much else should ever come to reside under this title. For it seems as though the framers of the syllabus had entered into a conspiracy to avoid all thought on first principles – that is a conspiracy to build castles in the air.

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[4] Maitland, *Collected Papers*, iii. 286.

[5] Pollock, *Introduction to Political Science*, p. 2. By 'all the best writers' I mean those who are not party to what may be called the 'inductive fallacy'. Mill's

The study of political science at Cambridge, as I have already indicated, leaves one (and rightly) with a certain view of what political science is. In the first place, there seems no doubt that its subject matter is political institutions. And how political institutions are to be separated from institutions of other varieties is one of the initial problems. It may be solved by defining the word 'political'. This definition is, however, nowhere expressly performed, in fact it seems hardly to have been given any specific consideration, for the current use of the word is accepted without criticism, thus dismissing off-hand the most important problem of the whole study. Yet, as it happens there is no word in our language more abused than this word 'politics'. In consequence of this choice, the Cambridge Syllabus comes to occupy its attention with the *forms of government*, the history of their development, the classification of those at present in existence, the detailed examination of those which have passed away, and the comparative study of political institutions. This method of study, however, ensures that the real meaning of political invention, the real place of political institutions, and the true significance of the history of political science are hidden from any who would enquire into these questions. Let me support these statements in detail.

(a) *The Syllabus mistakes the subject-matter of Political Science.* In taking political institutions as the subject-matter of the study it assumes that if we cut them up sufficiently small, and classify them sufficiently rigidly, we shall reveal their

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Logic contains, perhaps, the finest exposition of this fallacy which no modern logician of any standing would countenance for an instant.

true place in the scheme of social life, whereas, indeed, we may resolve them to their minutest parts without finding ourselves one step nearer to the discovery of their real significance, which remains for ever outside them. Now, it is often claimed that in following this procedure we are pursuing the traditions of Aristotle's 'inductive method', but nothing could be further from the truth. We are asked to picture Aristotle (the same is required of Machiavelli and Montesquieu) as a man who, having examined 150 different constitutions, sat down to write a treatise on political science with these as his data. Indeed it is often said in so many words that were it not for the fact that these 150 constitutions existed within reach of Aristotle's study it is probable that political science would never have been among the glories of Greek speculation. But the slightest acquaintance with the writings of Aristotle and Plato immediately displays the falsity of this view. Both of them recognize that the subject-matter of political science is not institutions but *men*,[6] and they came to the study of it because they answered the question, 'What is the best and most satisfying life for the individual?' by saying, 'It is a political or social life'. Aristotle's political philosophy is contained, in the main, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and in the *Politics*, and we find that out of a total of some eighteen 'Books' hardly more than three are concerned with the forms of government. And not only this, but Aristotle himself goes so far as to ridicule the very procedure of taking institutions as the subject-matter of Politics.[7] The fact is, to speak in a figure, the Cambridge syllabus assumes that books iv, v, and vi of the *Politics* of Aristotle comprise the whole of political science.

A subsidiary circumstance may, perhaps, be noted at this point. Maitland's reasons for rejecting the Cambridge syllabus were based on the assumption that the subject-matter of political science is political institutions, and it would be a failure of logic straightaway to apply them to a study with a different subject-matter. Yet, I venture to think that the real effect of his argument is to force us to the conclusion that politics is a moral science with man as its subject. It is this or nothing.

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[6] Cf. Thucydides, vii. 77 and i. 153; Rousseau, *Contrat Social*, I. vi. (note).

[7] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X. IX. 20-21, and Grant's note. 'The path of political science lies, in his view, rather through Ethics than through History', Newman, *Politics of Aristotle*, i. 34.

(b) *It preoccupies itself with forms of government.* That this is so can hardly be doubted by anyone who has so much as glanced at the syllabus itself, but the full significance of the fact may not at once be evident. Yet, it is not too much to say that it is just this misplacement of emphasis and oversetting of proportion which has led to the most sinister and characteristic feature of much modern writing, and all popular thinking, on political subjects – the identification of the 'State' with the 'Government'. This is too large a question to enter upon here, but it may be said that not until a certain school of writers unburden themselves of this identification will they be in a position to judge fairly and criticise fittingly what is called the Idealist theory of the State. That 'government' is a subject worthy of, and requiring much thought is not to be denied. It has been well said that 'a good government remains one of the greatest of human blessings, and no nation has ever enjoyed it.' But it is as gross a fallacy to suppose that the whole of man's life as a social being can be summed up in terms of government as to suppose that the source of a poets inspiration may be found in his *Belesenheit*: and a political science which, defining the State as government, occupies itself with ringing the changes on different institutions and forms of government (which are limitless and, as Aristotle saw, entirely defy classification), excludes from its purview not one half of its proper subject-matter, but well nigh the whole of it. And, moreover, this procedure is foreign to the writings of all the great political philosophers.

If, in defence, it is said that the Cambridge syllabus is planned to cover not the whole of political science (for that were impossible) but that part of it which is concerned with the forms of government, I reply that we cannot have any true thoughts about the form of government until we have considered the question of government itself, and we cannot consider the question of government as if it were isolated and cut off from the rest of human experience, for its value and significance is wholly bound up with matters larger than itself. 'Those great men Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle, the most consummate in politics, who founded states, or instructed princes, or wrote most accurately on public government, were at the same time most acute at all abstracted and sublime speculations; the clearest light being ever necessary to guide the most important actions. And whatever the world thinks, he who has not meditated upon God, the human mind, and the *summum bonum*, may possibly make a thriving earth-worm, but will most indubitably make a blundering patriot and a sorry statesman.'[8] And the same thing – to wit, that Political Philosophy to be itself and to be of any value must include the study of things which give meaning and significance to the mere forms of government and the institutions of human society – has been said by Plato and Aristotle, Saint Paul, Spinoza, Carlyle, Ruskin, and every other writer with any true grasp of the subject.

(c) *It misses the 'real thing'*. This is the most serious charge that can be brought against the syllabus, but it is the inevitable consequence of having taken the wrong turning at the very commencement of the journey, that is, having failed to define 'politics' with any degree of accuracy or intelligibility. George Eliot in her novel *Felix Holt* speaks (if I mistake not) of 'vulgar pipe-smokers.' Now, if pipe-smoking were a thing held vulgar at the time of Felix Holt, this is certainly not the case in our days. Yet it must be admitted that the two facts – pipe-smoking and vulgarity – are still with us. Here, what I have called the 'real thing' is vulgarity, and pipe-smoking something which can be rightly attached to it only at specific times in the world's history. If George Eliot were writing to-day she would find some other characteristic to couple with vulgarity, for, while the form changes, the real thing remains. The Cambridge syllabus speaks of the 'city-state', the 'nation-state', and the 'modern-state', and its whole emphasis goes to accentuate the change which has taken place (as it is thought) in the State. But in the phrase 'nation-state', 'nation' corresponds to 'pipe-smoking', and as vulgarity is a constant factor, so is the State, remaining in essence entirely unchanged amid the metamorphoses of form and outward appearance. This fact, the State itself, is ignored by the syllabus, which, as we saw, is so occupied with its 'pipe-smoking' as to forget its 'vulgarity'.

It will not, perhaps, be out of order to push our examination of the State one step further before quitting the subject. Aristotle says: 'Things are defined by their working and power, and we ought not to say that they are the same when they are no longer the same, but only that they have the same name.' Let us, in the first place, apply this to the 'thing' we call an Army. To Aristotle's thinking it was essential that an army should be commanded by one man, and he does not seem to have thought it possible for a general to command an army the size of which did not permit him to address it by word of mouth. Yet, according to one account, Epaminondas commanded in the Peloponnesus an army numbering some 70,000 men; and in our own day we do not hold necessary any such restriction in size. But because the outward character has changed, changed so much that Aristotle would hardly recognize it as 'the same thing', are we any the less warranted in calling our multitudes of men, armies? I think it will be agreed that there is sufficient in common between our armies and those of antiquity to allow us to bring them under the same title; the form has changed, but the essential thing remains – judged, of course, by its working and power, nature and end. But, to choose another illustration, can the same be said of the Statesman? A Statesman to Aristotle was a man who occupied his mind with public matters, a leader of the people because he possessed the ability and inclination to acquaint himself with the intricacies of public policy and to occupy himself with public improvements. Not only were his actions public (as, indeed, are the actions of any lawyer in our own day) but his mind was public – a public spirited man, as we say. But Aristotle, who in this matter disagreed with Plato, held that a Statesman was in some sort a government official. If you wished to find a true statesman in Athens you would seek him in the ranks of the 'government': and this is why Aristotle pays so much attention to what he calls the 'constitution'. To-day we have the outward form (unlike the case of the army), but the spirit has taken wings. If we are prepared to define a Statesman according to the source of his income then it is still plausibly true that the outward form of a Statesman is a government official, but that would be as fantastic a system of definition as to define a yachtsman as a man who wears white ducks and a yachting cap and walks the parade at Brighton. There can be no doubt that the time has now passed (if, indeed, it ever existed) when we can look without disappointment for our statesmen among the ranks of the 'government'. It is not to be denied, of course, that there are Statesmen holding such positions, but an ever increasing number are to be found outside these offices. And 'we ought not to say that they are the same when they are no longer the same, but only that they have the same name.'

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[8] Berkeley, *Siris*, para. 350.

We may now return to the question in hand, that is to the State. There existed things called States in Aristotle's day, and there exist things we call States to-day. Has the spirit remained unchanged in spite of a development of form (as in the case of the army), or has the spirit flown and the form remained? Most certainly the form has changed, and we sometimes indicate that change by the expressions 'city-state' and 'nation-state'. But, I contend, the spirit, the essential State, remains unchanged, in the same sense, and in the same way, as does the essential army. If the initial subject matter of political science is man, the study will advance from man to this essential State, and from this, perhaps, a treatment of forms and organizations will flow. But the facts on which I want to place all the emphasis are that the Cambridge syllabus entirely misses the 'real thing', occupies itself almost exclusively with the passing forms of government, and never arrives at the State at all. It is concerned with points and studies not entirely unimportant, but drawing such importance as they possess from sources outside themselves. If I may sum up, again in a figure, had not the study of theology advanced beyond the defence of Christianity against arguments based on the date of the Book of Daniel and those drawn from geological observation, it would now be in a similar position to the study of political science in Cambridge and elsewhere.

4. It will be noted that in treating of other matters I have indicated to some extent what I take to be the true view of the nature of political science, but it is now time to set out that view in a more concise form. I have said, that if the term Political Science is to have any valid meaning at all, it must refer to a *moral* and not a natural science, that is, our subject is more properly named Political Philosophy than anything else. Philosophy seeks to elucidate *meaning*. 'The analysis of fact leads simply to other facts which may equally well be made the objects of further analysis. Indeed, by analysing a single fact into a number of separate elements, we are in general only multiplying our problems. An analysis of meaning or explanation, on the other hand, simplifies our problem, by

leading us to broader principles under which a number of particular cases may be brought; and such a method may at last lead us to that which explains itself and carries us no further.'[9] Where the Cambridge syllabus fails is in its attempt to make political science into a natural science which gives its definitions in terms of fact and not of meaning. A couple of examples will illustrate this. One is drawn from section A and the other from section B. We are told that 'Sovereignty is the supreme power in the State'. But it is evident that this is merely a circular definition such as is to be had from any dictionary of synonyms, except that it adds the words 'in the State', thereby introducing a further unknown quantity. Or perhaps it were more accurate to say that it is no definition at all; it is a paraphrase of a term, not the definition of a thing. In the same way, section B. includes a discussion of punishment. It is treated as a Social institution, perhaps its history is sketched, theories of origin given, and finally a treatment of it from the legal and psychological points of view. But all this is only an explanation in terms of fact and brings us no nearer to the meaning, the reality to which this institution gives expression. For psychology is not philosophy, it is a study of fact and not of meaning, of origin and development and not of value.

On what method does philosophy proceed? Let us again take an example. If a philosophy arrives at a theistic conception of the universe it does *not* do so by collecting all the ideas men have had about God, the different gods men have worshipped, and then (assuming all the ideas are of an equal value) classifying them according to some arbitrary principle of what is normal. On the contrary it proceeds by the critical examination of conceptions and seeks to discover the logical necessity for, and logical coherence of such a conception as that of a God. And it is in this manner that it must proceed in the examination of the State. Just as it is absurd to think of arriving at a theism by classifying all known gods, so it is equally absurd to think of arriving at a true idea of the State by similar methods. It may be right to reject the idea of the State – as some reject the idea of God – but it is a matter for thought and study and not for prejudice and the inductive method. 'Philosophy, like religion, must seek to view human life in relation to those principles which are at the making and unmaking of States; it cannot "sit on a hill remote" to reason about abstractions; it cannot but attempt to comprehend the greatest of organisms, the State, which, in the "architectonic of its rationality", is the highest result of the conscious and unconscious working of reason in the life of man; but like religion, it must suffer loss when it is drawn into the region of immediate practical politics and confounded with the attack and defence of special measures and institutions.'[10]

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[9] J.S. MacKenzie, *An Introduction to Social Philosophy*, p. 22.

In a word, we must at the outset make that fundamental distinction which is at the root of all philosophy. I mean the distinction between Origin and Validity. The business of philosophy is to deal with the grounds, not the causes of ideas, conceptions, beliefs, institutions and the rest. 'There is no distinction,' says Lord Balfour, 'which has to be kept more steadily in view than this between the causes or antecedents which produce a belief, and the grounds or reasons which justify one. The enquiry into the first is psychological, the enquiry into the second is philosophical.' 'No doubt,' he continues, 'in constructing a philosophy, a previous psychological enquiry may be required. It may be necessary to acquaint ourselves with the various modes by which we arrive at a conviction, before we can select those which are legitimate. But what we must not do, and we are very apt to do, is to suppose that by performing the first operation satisfactorily, we absolve ourselves from performing the second at all. In the face of modern discovery we have continually to recollect that no progress made in the tracing of the history of opinions, no development in the theory of the association of ideas, no application of the doctrine of evolution to mind, however much they may prepare the ground for philosophy, add, or can add, one fragment to its structure.' This word 'grounds' has a familiar ring. Is it not to be found on the title page of Green's book on Political Obligation? He sets himself to study the 'grounds of Political Obligation.' And do we not find it also in our Student's Handbook? Political Science B. studies the 'grounds of Political Obligation' – a philosophical study. So we find the very syllabus pledging itself to a philosophical enquiry, and yet, at the same time, conducting it in a method which is neither that of science nor that of philosophy, that is, trying to elucidate *grounds* by a study of *causes*. A procedure calculated to produce (and actually effecting) a state of the most unqualified confusion of thought.

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[10] Caird, *Hegel*, p. 95.

'*Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas*', says the poet, but did he attain the utmost felicity in this manner he would not have begun to be a philosopher.

Where then is the political philosopher to commence his study? This is a question not easily answered, and, like everything else, will find its adequate answer only at the end. 'Consider the end before you begin', says a wise Persian proverb. And yet the necessity remains for beginning somewhere, and, as Aristotle remarks, if we do not 'begin well' we are not likely to reach any satisfactory conclusion. It is said by some that political philosophy is a part of Ethics, by others (e.g. Spinoza) that Ethics is a part of Politics, and there seem equally good arguments for beginning our study with the state as for beginning it with the apparent individual. But for the practical purposes of enquiry (which must always fall short of the ideal method, which is to study both at once) we shall not go far wrong in starting with the individual and tracing the logical rise of the State from the necessities of his nature. We start, then, so to speak, with the *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is impossible to elaborate here the various stages in the building up of our philosophy (even if I were capable of doing so), but, suffice it to say that we should pass from the individual to the State, from man unreal to man in the process of becoming real. And from thence to the institutions of government. The Cambridge syllabus, when it spares a moment to treat of the State, defines it in terms of anthropology, psychology, or the anatomy of the body-politic; but political science, properly so-called, must treat it from the point of view of meaning and value. And so when it comes to study the institutions of social life it will not fly off into an irrelevant treatment of the habits of animals, of the marriage ceremonies of the inhabitants of Morocco or the islands of Fiji (subjects in which our 'sociologists' seem more deeply versed than in the institutions and thoughts of Englishmen to-day), but will occupy itself, in the first place, with the idea, end, scope, and power of government itself, and latterly with the institutions which, always inadequately, embody this idea. Nor will it treat only of the institutions which are called governmental, but will attend also to those, of far greater importance in our social life, such as the family, the school, marriage, war, property and the rest.

During the course of this study, if properly conducted, our minds would be returning again and again from Politics to Ethics, enlarging and deepening the conceptions there first hinted at. Thus, for example, religion from being treated as an activity of isolated individuals, will come to be viewed as the basis of social life, and this new knowledge, being reflected back upon the individual, we may hope to be spared such statements as that of Mr Laski,[11] 'Religious associations are the expression of a conviction that to accept certain dogmas is to secure induction into the Kingdom of Heaven' – evincing so total an ignorance and lack of appreciation of the history and philosophy of religion. Or again, instead of confining our attention to what is called 'State Education' (one wonders how so gross a misappropriation of the word 'State' could ever have been perpetrated), we should be led to the study of Education itself – a study to which, curiously enough, both Plato and Aristotle deemed it necessary to devote so much of their thought.

Political Science has, for one reason or another, stepped aside into the blind-alley of the exclusive study of institutions, and this had led many of our social reformers to place their hopes in new methods, new organization and new forms, and to concentrate their immediate effort on bringing these into being. But true political science is the study of the nature and meaning of human association and the principles that underlie it. And its necessary propadeutic is not (as some think) the statistical study of civilizations, not the comparative examination of the institutions of social life, not the laborious collection and classification of forms of government, but a study of the human mind and the principles of association which its nature displays; for the problem of Unity is the central question of political science, and friendship the basis of all politics. Aristotle gained far more as a political philosopher from his tutorship of Alexander the Great than from his collection of constitutions. The raw material of political science is to be found in the lives and experiences of a schoolmaster, a University teacher, a social worker,[12] or a thoughtful man with many friends, rather than in those of a politician or a collector of statistics.

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[11] Laski, *Authority in the Modern State*, p. 81.

To anticipate for a moment the subject of the remaining section of these remarks; this University, as well as others for all I know, neglects an opportunity of study as precious and illuminating as it is unique. We live in a great institution – the University itself – and are members of other institutions called colleges, and yet, like friend Glaucon,[13] insist upon 'gazing at some point in the distance' – the constitution of Monaco or of the League of Nations, or, further still, 'the savage democracy' (as Parkman calls it) of the Iroquois Indians – while all the time the essential principles of organization and human association are 'rolling before our feet'.[14] It is a truth of all education that we must start where we find ourselves. It is the part of a teacher to teach first what can be understood and not all that is in his mind. For advance in knowledge is the finding of a place for new experience within the system of what we already know. It were a wise course to start with our studies 'at home', with the institutions which we already know and with the material with which our own experience has made us familiar. To make adequate use of this raw material it is not necessary to publish the University Statutes in handy form (with a special analysis for examination purposes); all that is required is a reflective examination of our life here, the principles of our association, the reality of our institutions, and, comparing these with the necessities we find within ourselves, win somewhat nearer to a true understanding of the nature and end of political life.

5. It remains to put forward some few suggestions concerning the actual reorganization of the syllabus. And I do this, not because of the individual value or helpfulness that any of them may happen to possess, but simply to make clearer the nature of the reorganization I take to be desirable. Part I of the Historical Tripos includes a study of – in the first year – Mediaeval European History, the Economic History of Eng-

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[12] An active member of the Charity Organisation Society, for instance, as Bosanquet was for many years.

[13] Plato, *Republic*, 432 d. The quotation at the head of these remarks has a reference primarily to the error of studying forms and not the 'thing itself', but there is also the error of studying forms of which we have little or no experience in preference to those with which we are familiar.

[14] Cf. Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, p. 150 *seq.*

land, and the Later Constitutional History of England; and in the second year Early Constitutional History of England and Political Science A. Now, as we have already seen, Political Science A. covers part of the same ground as is covered (i) in the Mediaeval History of Europe, by giving a sketchy outline of Mediaeval political thought, always more ably and more appropriately to be had from the Lecturer in Mediaeval History, and (ii) in the Later Constitutional History of England, which treats of the growth of the Constitution up to the present day together with the latest developments in the organization of the Empire, and could easily be made to include, if it does not already do so, all that both Political Science A. and B. say on these matters. I do not pretend that such a regrouping of studies solves any really important question. The Historical Tripos is a whole, and should be regarded as such by anyone studying under it, and not as a collection of subjects without any reference to each other. But our lectures and our examination papers are divided into different subjects, and it were well to make this division as true to fact as possible. And, moreover, this will effect a clearance which may unburden political science of so vast a mass of inappropriate material that it will be free to advance in the true paths of its study.

Under this reorganization Political Science A. would become the History of Political Science – the history of man's struggle to think rightly about his relation to his fellow creatures. Starting, I suppose, with the beginnings of speculation in Asia Minor and Greece, it would recount the story of that revolution in thought effected by Socrates and Plato and supremely utilized by Aristotle. It would indicate the gradual death of true reflective thought, and its rebirth in the philosophers of the Renaissance – Machiavelli, Spinoza, Hobbes and the rest. And, passing through the theories of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it would treat of the other great epoch of political theorizing – that engendered by Rousseau, the tide of whose thought has not yet spent itself. Remembering always to preserve that most precious and truth-revealing element of thought, a sense of the proportional greatness and importance of the various contributions of men. It is, of course, impossible to treat such a history without some reference to the nature of the times in which its outstanding figures lived. Neither let it be supposed that history is a mass of facts in chronological order. It is no less than a theory of the whole, it is an account of facts in relation to one another, and cannot be intelligibly narrated except with an ever recurring reference to those elements of thought and action which, running through the whole length and breadth of it, bind it together, making a whole from what might seem only a mass of parts. The history of thought cannot be told by the recounting of the theories of individual men, with a dead-weight of emphasis on the difference of time and environment which effected a change of thought. That which draws together the whole must be more evident than that which makes for distinctions, for it is the natural action of uneducated minds to be continually elevating distinctions into differences. Take, for example, the theory of the Social Contract. How often has this been trampled on and abused, how often ridiculed and scorned as the bitter fruit of the unhistorical mind! But to treat it thus is to make certain of missing its true significance, and so, in the end, the key to the whole history eludes our search. The Social Contract is a *convention of thought*. We are all aware what is meant by a convention of social life. Money, for instance, has all the essentials of conventionality. For several centuries Europe's leading economists were under the impression that it was a 'real thing'; money is wealth, they said; and nowadays, while the fallacy has long since been abandoned by economists, it remains a popular delusion than which there is none more wide-spread or more productive of evil. Now, though our life requires its conventions it is not itself conventional. Its desires, aims, purposes, powers are real and it is only in the expression of these that the conventional element enters. So it is with thought. It seeks a conventional expression for real ideas, desires, purposes and conceptions. And, as social life is nothing without expression, so thought cannot be divorced from language; yet to think in terms of technical phrases and the forms of language is to put conventions in the place of 'real things', a procedure which (as in the case of the Mercantilist economists, and that of those whose lives are merely conventional) will indubitably fill our minds and lives with all manner of error and delusion. And so with many of our historians of political thought, they are tireless in their treatment of the Social Contract (and all the other conventions of Politics), but they conduct it all after the manner of the ancient Mercantilists, the error of whose ways was exposed by a man born two hundred years ago. A history of conventions is no doubt entertaining – to some. Many would find an interest in an account of the growth and development of the forms of poetry and the conventions of versifying. But to present such an account as a history of poetry would be an error so gross that it would be hard to find its equal. History must pluck aside conventions, value them truly and not abuse them, for its concern is with the story, not of forms, but of 'real things'. Conventions evolve, and we may hope purify themselves; they are a continual effort to express true needs and desires. And a history which does not seek out the golden chain of 'real things' binding together all thought and life stands for ever divorced from reality. When men speculate about the nature and meaning of our social life they set themselves a problem which it has been the desire of many struggling minds to solve, and the history of this struggle must be told in terms of the problem itself, or it will be meaningless. Political Science A., then, shall be understood to mean a history of Political Science from its earliest beginnings to the present day.

I have already given some indication of what I take to be the proper study of Political Science B., so it will not detain us long at this point. It should be the construction of a theory of the State; that is to say a philosophical, reflective study. It has been wisely said that 'our age has discovered how to divorce knowledge from thought',[15] and there is no more fitting opportunity for combating this sinister feature of our intellectual life than that afforded by this course. Its aim should be, commencing with the apparent individual, to build up a theory of the social facts we see around us and the necessities we find within us. No doubt we should be greatly assisted in this by the course of study followed in Political Science A., but it is sufficiently different, containing within itself its own raw material and data, to make it a possible subject independent of previous study. In short, Political Science B. shall be understood to mean the study of the nature and end of the State.

It might appear from the foregoing that my criticism of the syllabus applied (as that of Maitland) only to its appropriation of the title Political Science, but this is not so.[16] It would be a great calamity, in my opinion, to change the title and leave the subject and the method of study unaltered. There is a true Political Science, a moral science, the value of which as a subject of study in a University cannot easily be overestimated. And this leads me to my concluding observation. So far I have based my plea for the revision of the syllabus upon the fact of its own internal inconsistency and its maladaption to the rest of the Historical Tripos, but there is a further point which seems to me relevant. The University is, at least, in part, an institution for the education of men who have not yet taken up the work of their lives. We come, most of us, from school, and, while all of us need, many of us desire, some sound guidance about that aspect of life which is common to all – life as the citizen of a state, as a man among men. We come in the position of Polemarchus, son of Cephalus: young men who have, to a certain extent at least, accepted the traditions and conventions of social life but have neither understood them nor thought much about them. We come seeking our Socrates: at present he is denied us. And in consequence we join a political party and make no further attempt at reflection on these matters, turning our minds to other pursuits, or settle down, with little or no guidance, to discover the secrets of the philosophers and construct as best we can some thoughts on the nature and meaning of our relations to our fellow creatures. We are not all destined to be Members of Parliament, or to hold positions under the government of this country or of any other, but, to a man, we are citizens of a country, members of a community, and there can be no study so intimately connected with our life as this we call Political Philosophy. The reform of our social life and institutions, or rather the guidance of their growth, is for the most part (and always has been) in the hands of men actuated by the highest moral principles and of the greatest courage and perseverance, but largely without any real wisdom or knowledge of the nature of our necessary relations to one another or of the institutions of human society. Often they have thought fit to acquaint themselves with the history (chiefly the economic history) of our country and the laws of our land, and so far they are wise. But from history, on the whole, we can infer only what has been, and not what will be; and law, says Gierke, is the result of a common conviction not that a thing shall be, but that it is. It is a knowledge gained from the study of the principles that underlie all growth in human society, all development of mind, all education of personality which alone will avail to guide aright that continuing effort we call social reform. The problem of how to remove the veil which habit has bound over men's eyes, and get them to recognize the true principles of human association, is one of the hardest our life offers us, yet one whose questionings cannot with impunity be denied. It is true that it is not the aim of a philosophical study to guide the practice of men, it is true that a theoretical treatment of social life to be successfully achieved must be conducted in the single desire to *know*. Yet we may profitably ask ourselves, 'whether an early habit of reflection, although obtained by speculative sciences, may not have its use in practical affairs?'[17] And there can be small doubt that were such a school built up as I have indicated a wiser generation of citizens and leaders would issue from our walls.

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[15] Schweitzer, *The Decay and the Restoration of Civilization*, p. 72.

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[16] Though, for the sake of mere accuracy, to get rid of the name Political Science in favour of Political Philosophy would be an advantage. 'Political Science' in conception is as antiquated a term as 'Natural Philosophy'.

April, 1924

EDITORIAL NOTES

[i] LSE 1/1/2. Typescript with autograph corrections.

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[17] Berkeley, *The Querist*, 197.

Three

An Essay on the Relations of Philosophy, Poetry and Reality

Felix qui rerum potuit cognescere causas.[ii]

> I understand Reality (*substantia*) to be that which is in itself and is conceived through itself: I mean that, the conception of which does not depend on the conception of another thing from which it must be formed.
>
> Spinoza, *Ethics*, I

> The principal cause of our uncertainty is that the only comprehension we may have of Reality (The One) comes neither by scientific observation, nor by the strivings of the mind – as comes our understanding of other things – but by an immediate Presence, which far transcends all learning...This is why Plato says that Reality is ineffable and indescribable. Yet we speak and write of it; but only in order to arouse our souls and to start ourselves on the way to that Divine Vision: like as when one showeth a pilgrim on his way to some shrine that he would visit: for our words may only show us the way and guide us thereon, the Vision itself is the sole work of him who hungers to see.
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> Plotinus, *Ennead*, VI.ix.4

> It is good to be tired and wearied in the vain search after the Ethical Reality (*le vrai bien*), that we may stretch out our arms to the Redeemer.
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> Pascal, *Pensées*, 422 (1)

I. INTRODUCTION

AIM OF ESSAY

1. From the moment man was moved with a desire to think things out for himself – so soon as he became a philosopher – he discovered that the source of his knowledge of the phe-

nomena around him lay in himself. It was long, indeed, before he became conscious of this fact; but, nevertheless, he was not slow to see that the man who knew himself the best held a position of great advantage in any attempt at the discovery of the truth about the universe. In some forms the desirability of this knowledge of self is easily understood; for it was not until man had acquired, to a degree, the ability to stand outside himself and to *use* his faculties instead of being at their mercy that he discovered the unending possibilities which lay in their appropriation to the ends for which they were best suited. And along with the discovery of the uses to which certain of his faculties might be put for the best advantage man realized the fact, or the possibility, of misuse. Instead of expending his life and its energies with the reckless prodigality characteristic of the unthinking animal, man first learnt, not to hoard them with a miserliness which is a travesty of his true discovery, but to use them with *economy*. This development may easily be paralleled in man's use of tools[1] or in the gradual specialization which grew up in the family and clan, but none of these can compare in importance with the dawning realization of the differing uses to which his senses and faculties might be put. Man's use of himself is more important than all the rest; man's abuse of himself and his faculties is the greatest of the tragedies of human life. It is easy to see how essential to life is a rudimentary knowledge of the way in which man's senses should be used; in fact this knowledge is often inherent in the possession of the sense – it seems to adapt itself to its proper end; in the senses will and knowledge are joined. But this is not the case with what we may call man's faculties. He must learn by experience to appreciate the value, for instance, of the faculties of reasoning and speech. And I propose in this essay to make clear to myself the purpose to which these faculties of reasoning and speech may properly be turned, that is, turned to the best advantage. In a true economy of all man's faculties and senses, what is the place occupied by reason, and speech its most common expression?

THE TRUE ECONOMY OF MAN'S FACULTIES

2. When man has turned aside for a moment from the immediate concerns of living, sooner or later he is led to enquire what is the nature of Reality. Indeed, so soon as he is

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[1] Indeed M. Bergson asserts that the intellect is but a tool evolved expressly to deal with situations in which man is placed in the material world.

confronted with one of the many paradoxes of life, so soon as he sees that in one instance at least things are not what they at first seemed, the problem of reality is thrust upon him. But how man came to enquire into the nature of reality does not here concern us; the fact of his having done so is clear enough. He had long been engaged on this enquiry before it occurred to him to examine the tools of which he was making use, but when he did so he discovered that all men were not using the same. Some sought to turn the soil of ignorance with one tool and some with another, and even when the tool was the same the manner in which it was being used was different. Also, in the course of time abuses had crept in; traditions grew up concerning the ways in which truth might legitimately be sought and the ways barred by common consent, and with these all manner of corruptions and superstitions. Men have been deluded into thinking that truth may only be discovered by the performance of certain ceremonies and rites, and have deluded their fellows into vain practises promising them as a reward this treasure for which all were seeking. But from amid this tangled mass we may distinguish two main approaches to Reality of which man has made constant use. The one we may call the approach of the *Intellect*, recorded in the history of Philosophy; the other, the approach of *Intuition*, set down for the most part in the history of Mysticism.[2]

FAITH OR REASON

3. At first sight it would seem that the distinction is simply one of temperament. Your Rousseau will be led in one direction and your Hegel in another according to the differences of their mental and spiritual make up. But it is only in extreme cases that we can make so clear a distinction. For the most part, normal men will find within themselves both these tendencies, will be able to make use of both these faculties; and anyone who is accustomed to examine himself will recognize that in this, as in other particulars, he bears in himself a fundamental conflict. We cannot shut our eyes to the fact that, so far as the enquiry into the nature of Reality is concerned, these two approaches are fundamentally differ-

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[2] In this sense the history of Mysticism has never been written; and as I suppose is inevitable histories of this the greatest of man's activities are poor things. As we shall see later none can pretend to completeness which is not also a history of poetry, and indeed of all man's religious longings and the means he has used to satisfy them.

ent and mutually exclusive. They are two methods made use of by man, they are two faculties whose proper uses must, if possible, be ascertained. In the course of this essay we shall enquire into the proper uses of these faculties, and consider their respective claims as the only legitimate approach to Reality.

The problem of Faith and Reason is one which has occupied many minds and perplexed not a few. It is evident from the sheer number of works on the subject that it must be faced and answered by each generation – nay, by each individual – for, as with so many of our perplexities, there is no final answer which can be written down and handed on, for to each the problem occurs in a different manner, and the answer of each, though in principle the same, will be different in form; rest lies not in the answer itself but in the finding of it. Sometimes this phenomenon is called the conflict between Faith and Knowledge, but so designated it loses all significance. The real conflict is between the claim of the intellect to say that it KNOWS, and the claim of the intuitive sense that, in its nature, it alone can KNOW Reality. Civilized man's first impulse is to reject the claims of intuition; his intellectual pride does not willingly admit of any limitation of the sphere of its activity. But this is a false position; men are limited if they persist in confining themselves to the use of one faculty, or seek to merge into one all their faculties of knowing. This then is the position: each of man's faculties has a proper use; his intellectual faculty and his intuitive faculty – philosophy and mysticism – both claim the exclusive ability to apprehend Final Truth, Ultimate Reality, the Absolute, God – such are the names given to this treasure which is so highly prized. To the present the intellect has won the allegiance of general opinion; but it is my purpose here to question this decision, and to suggest that the reverse is a truer account of the proper economy of man's faculties. To anticipate the whole conclusion of the essay – I shall suggest that philosophy, in so far as it claims to know God (but in no other respect), encroaches upon the field of Religion.

ORIGINALITY

4. I do not pretend that such an enquiry is unique and entirely original; and in this essay I have made frequent use of other mens' labours. But as I have hinted it is an enquiry which we must make for ourselves, and our conclusions will be our own – if our enquiry be honest – even thought we be

assisted by other thinkers. Originality does not lie so much in the promulgation of some absolutely new idea – for that were well nigh impossible – but in a certain independence and individuality of thought which makes old ideas our own. 'That virtue of originality that men so strain after,' says Ruskin, 'is not newness, as they vainly think (there is nothing new), it is only genuineness.' And, indeed, the whole essay is little else than an expansion of that very beautiful passage of Plotinus from which a quotation has already been made.[3]

REALITY

5. At the outset it will be well to lay the foundations of our argument as firmly as may be, and we will commence with certain axioms and definitions. To many these will appear no more than hypotheses or little better than mere assertions of opinion; but to my mind there are certain axiomatic qualities which we must apply to Reality by definition before we start our enquiry. Indeed, if this were not so all enquiry would be vain; for how can we search for something which we shall not recognize when we see it?[4] For this general description of the nature of Reality I have been unable to find or formulate a better than that which Spinoza places at the head of his treatise on Ethics. He says: 'I understand Reality (*substantia*) to be that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; I mean that, the conception of which does not depend upon the conception of another thing from which it must be formed.'[5] Some may quarrel with this axiom, but in this essay if an object or aspect of an object does not correspond to this general description it will be rejected as unreal. It implies that Reality can be explained only by itself and in terms of itself. The value of this principle has often been demonstrated, but

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[3] Plotinus, *Ennead*, VI,ix. Kant (who in this matter owed much to Rousseau) was perhaps the first modern philosopher to pay any serious attention to this matter, but since his day it has become a subject of very wide enquiry. Schopenhauer, William James, (M. Bergson), F.H. Bradley and L.P. Jacks hold similar views, while the stronghold of the opposition is in the Neo Hegelian school, and finds a very complete expression in the late Sir Henry Jones' *A Faith that Enquires*, some of whose arguments we shall examine later.

[4] This principle, that we must, to some extent, be what we desire to be, know what we desire to know, before we can desire to be or know it, is familiar. We remember the words that Pascal heard his Master say to him, — '*Tu ne me chercherais pas si tu ne me possédais.*' Browning, – 'Tis the taught already that profits by teaching.' ('Christmas Eve') And William De Morgan, – 'If you'd 'a knowed 'em when you seed 'em, you migh have kep' your eye open, and took note.' (*It Never Can Happen Again*, Chapter 21.)

[5] Spinoza, *Ethics*, Pt. I.

nowhere more acutely than by Dr. G.E. Moore in his *Principia Ethica* where he exposes the vanity of explaining Reality (which Ethics calls the *True Good*) in terms of happiness, utility, or what not.[6] Reality is Reality, the Good is the Good, it is an Absolute, and to call it something else, to explain it in other terms but confuses the issue. This then is our fundamental position; it is put forward as no hypothesis, but as an assertion.

THE 'THING'

6. There follows from this a further consideration. The 'Thing' is a term which does duty in philosophy (most usually) as the name given to that part, or that aspect, of a phenomenon which is real. Thus our use of the term will differ as we give to Reality a different place, or a different significance, or a different nature. Briefly there are two main positions adopted by philosophers. Either they say that the 'Thing' is its activities,[7] or that it is something which subsists behind its activities, different in nature, and therefore not wholly knowable through them. The first of these is the position adopted (in general) by the English Hegelian school. 'A thing,' says Sir Henry Jones, 'is what it does……Strip an object of its activities, and see what remains: you will find nothing.'[8] And again; 'I have rejected the notion that a thing is a being which lurks somewhere in the background of its deeds and is therefore unknown and unknowable.'[9] Not only does Sir Henry Jones give no reason for this rejection, but later in this work he says; 'A man's deeds spring from *his character*. They are his way of meeting the wants he believes he has discovered *in himself*.'[10] Are we then to conclude that a man's character – himself – is nothing, does not exist except in his deeds? Surely not. Strip a man of his activities, strip him of his qualities, and is nothing left?[11] We do not love a man for his deeds, or for his qualities, we love him for himself, for what he *is*. Do we then love a mere unreal abstraction? I think not. Personality, character, spirit, is the only reality in man, all else is but a shadow (says Plato), a sign

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[6] These things may be good, but good cannot be identified with them: the Good can be explained by itself alone. See Bradley and Jacks for similar arguments.

[7] This was a favourite assertion of Nettleship.

[8] Sir Henry Jones, *A Faith that Enquires*, p. 242.

[9] ibid, p. 297.

[10] ibid, p. 309.

[11] cf. Pascal, *Pensées*, 323.

(says Christianity), an inadequate expression of this. The 'Thing', if you will, *does* 'lurk somewhere in the background of its deeds'; we must reject the notion that the 'Thing' is its activities; things and qualities must be clearly marked off from one another.[12]

REASON AND INTUITION

7. There is one further point of definition which must engage our attention for a moment. Those who contend that man's intellect – that Reason – is the only faculty by which he may come to know the reality of things are fond of disarming their opponents by such statements as these. 'Reason is self-consciousness. It is only as taken into our selfconsciousness, and so presented to us as an object, that anything is known to us.'[13] 'Mind is never so really at one as in its intuitive activities.'[14] Reason is made supreme because in it are swallowed up all man's faculties of knowing. The great temptation is that of making all things shadowy, of creating an artificial uniformity where no such thing really exists. It is a misuse of the word reason or mind to include within it all man's intuitive faculties.[15] It is the fashion to explain the relations of Faith and Reason as if the one was but the other transcendent, 'tiptoe at the ultimate bound of her wit'. The possibility of there being different faculties in man, adapted for different ends, is rejected. Man is a whole, and when he acts or thinks he uses every faculty in its right place as by instinct. But if we limit the word 'rational' to the process of thought which issues in a logical demonstration then it is clear that human life in many of its aspects is fundamentally irrational. So, either we must say that the word 'rational' cannot be lim-

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[12] The importance of the whole question is easily seen when we apply it to the relation of God to his world. To the Neo-Hegelians God is exhausted in his creation. The world is as necessary to God as God is to the world. But Christianity and Platonism have always insisted that God minus the world = not ∅, but God.

'Though earth and man were gone,
And suns and universes cease to be,
And Thou wert left alone,
Every existence would exist in Thee.'

See Inge, *Outspoken Essays*, 2nd series, pp. 11–12.

[13] T.H. Green. 'Sermon on Faith', *Works*, iii. 267.

[14] Sir Henry Jones, *A Faith that Enquires*, p. 70.

[15] In any case the Hegelians do not have assertion all on their own side. 'Imagination is not a faculty; it is a state of our being in which all our faculties exist in the most exquisite equipoise.' (Walter de la Mare, *The Art of Fiction*, Lecture 1.) So with two counter-assertions we are no further than we were at the beginning.

ited in this way, or that reason is not our sole faculty of knowing, – and it does not seem to make any practical difference which course we adopt. 'Reason' is a label affixed to a definite activity of man, and the more definite that activity is made the more efficiently will language perform its function. What we must recognize is that reason, as the word is commonly used, does not cover the whole range of man's powers of knowing. If we say that the idea of faith cannot be separated from that of reason, that it is neither a substitute for reason nor an addition to it, but simply reason raised and expanded to its highest possibilities, we must recognize that this elevation and expansion has created something *new*, and henceforth reason and faith are distinct; in St Paul's words there is 'a new creature.' Whether or not it has grown out of the old, does not seem to matter much, the important fact is that it is new. Thus I shall use the word 'reason' in its more limited sense, because I believe that this is the best way of indicating the essential difference between this faculty and that of intuitive knowledge.[16]

PSYCHOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

8. But there is a second stratagem adopted by the Hegelians: they appeal to psychology. Intuitions are but emanations of past experience, they are the result of the unconscious powers of the mind which store and classify all our experience so that it shall be at our command in times of immediate need. Thought, they say, is often spasmodic, but none the less it is thought. When Sulla said that all his 'most happy resolutions have been the result, not of reasoning but of momentary inspiration', he did but display an ignorance of psychology; these momentary inspirations are as much the product of the mind – in its narrowest sense – as any chain of logical argument resulting in action. This, too, I believe, is the result of a confusion of thought. Many of our immediate judgements may emanate from this unconscious power of the mind; but will this explanation cover all that

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[16] Spinoza, as usual, is illuminating on this point. 'Absolute thought' is to him the whole epistemological equipment of man – including both will and love – and 'intellect' (what we ordinarily call thought as opposed to feeling) is but one mode of absolute thought, with great limitations. *Per intellectum enim (ut per se notum) non intelligimus absolutam cogitationem, sed certum tantum modum cogitandi, qui modus ab aliis, scilicet cupiditate, amore etc. differt.* (*Ethics*, Pt. I, Prop. XXXI). And again: 'If intellect and will appertain to the eternal essence of God, something far else must be understood by these attributes than what is commonly understood by men.' (*Ethics*, Pt. I, Prop. XVII, note.)

may be called inspiration? An example will show that it does not. 'A musician,' says Sir Henry Jones, 'can as little do without observations and judgement, purposeful reason and will, as he can do without his intuitions.'[17] But does this meet the facts? The musician 'cultivates within himself an impression of immediate certainty, an intuition, a glimpse of the truest and inmost life.'[18] The extra-intellectual character of musical genius is not hard to demonstrate, and one of the surest proofs lies in the fact that it requires little or no knowledge of life. 'Mozart astonished his friends in his fifth year; Beethoven in his eighth; and Hummel in his ninth. The reason is that music needs little from without. It requires none of that familiarity with life which costs painters and poets so much to acquire. It is simply the overpowering of an extraordinary endowment.'[19] Men guided by the sole faculty of reason are perplexed and uncertain, they formulate their '*theoria*' of the universe and cling to this –

> But God has a few of us whom He whispers in the ear;
> The rest may reason and welcome; 'tis we musicians who know.[20]

Intuition, inspiration, cannot be dismissed as but the result of an unconscious retaining and selective power of the mind. It is far other.

CONCLUSION

9. Thus far I have attempted to establish these two points. That the 'Thing' (Reality) is not exhausted in its activities, and so cannot be wholly known through them – in other words, Reality must be explained in terms of itself or not at all. And, that we cannot dismiss 'intuition' or 'inspiration' as a mere process of the mind. It has a separate existence and deserves treatment as a real faculty in man. Philosophy and mysticism are two methods by which man seeks Reality. We shall first examine the alleged aims and methods of Philosophy, and secondly, those of Poetry or Mysticism. We shall then compare and contrast them and finally draw our conclusions.

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[17] op. cit., p. 69.

[18] Jules Cambarieu, *Music; its Laws and Evolution*, p. 92.

[19] P.T. Forsyth, *Christ on Parnassus*, p. 202.

[20] Browning, 'Abt Vogler', XI.

II. PHILOSOPHY

THE BASIS OF PHILOSOPHY

10. I intend here briefly to examine the nature of philosophy, the end which it sets itself, and the means it uses to achieve this end. I have chosen 'philosophy' rather than 'the philosopher' because, since in its nature it can recognize no consensus of opinion, it would seem impossible to make any valid generalization about the philosopher. Every philosopher differs from every other one – if not in his final position, at least in the reason he gives for holding that position. Yet in some parts of this study there is a consensus of opinion, an impersonal body of teaching which in one form or another is accepted by 'philosophy'. This consensus is not to be found in results. It lies rather in the realm of *general method*. For example; logic in some form may be taken as part of the philosophic method. But Hegelian 'Logic' differs from that of Mill. What is common to both, and common to all philosophy, is the general idea of logic as the basis of all valid argument. Thus, amid all the contradictions of the philosophers, I wish to concern myself wholly with those basic principles of general method which are common to all philosophy.[21]

METHOD

11. Descartes was early convinced that what men needed most was some fixed set of principles to guide them in their use of the intellect. In the *Discours de la Méthode* he does not attempt to lay down rules which all should follow,[22] rather it is an autobiography demonstrating the necessity for all philosophers to think out for themselves their own principles of research. '*Ce n'est pas assez,*' he says, '*d'avoir l'esprit bon, mais le principal est de l'appliquer bien.*'[23] In this he is on common ground with all teachers. The futility of teaching conclusions instead of a power of mind to enable the disciple to reach them himself has been sufficiently demonstrated, and the philosopher, in so far as he is a teacher, desires, not to present his bare conclusions, but his method of reaching them, his principles of research. These are that common element, of which we have spoken, in all philosophy, and it would be hard to find a better expression of this fundamental basis than in the words of Victor Cousin. He says: '*Je serais heureux*

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[21] Those who do not agree with this consensus do not, by definition, follow the method of philosophy. For example, there have been intuitional 'philosophers', but there never was an intuitional philosophy.

[22] p. 19.

[23] p. 18.

si je pouvais vous presenter ici quelques vérités importantes et peu répandues: je le serais bien plus encore si je parvenais à établir dans votre esprit ce que est audessus de toute vérité particulière, savoir, la méthode.'[24]

WHAT PHILOSOPHY IS

12. To the question 'what is philosophy?' the history of philosophy gives the only adequate answer. The history of philosophic thought is the history of a continual process of distinction between ideas (distinction which is not division) and of a continual process of division between what is essential to an idea and what merely joins itself to one in particular circumstances. The idea of philosophy – like all ideas – has undergone this process of differentiation, a process by which the idea is gradually purified and freed from incidental relationship with other ideas (the ideas of culture and learning in general, for instance) – a process which is not yet completed. For this reason we should expect that philosophy in its early stages was a term with a wide and indefinite meaning. Plato, for example, says that philosophers 'are those who are able to grasp the eternal and the immutable', 'those who set their affections on that which in each case really exists.'[25] And Coleridge, that 'philosophy is the affectionate seeking after Truth.'[26] These are wide and indefinite meanings; but they have a greater value than as mere historical facts. They are the inadequate and groping expression of a true idea of comprehensiveness which in later days has become more nearly understood. With greater precision, William James says that 'philosophy, in the full sense, is only *man thinking*, thinking about generalities rather than about particulars.'[27] And Dean Inge – 'philosophy means thinking things out for oneself.' Thus, when in the eighteenth century the study of what is now called Natural Science was revived, more or less at the place where Aristotle had left it, it was called Natural Philosophy – retaining the name up to the day of Tyndall and Huxley and even into the present century. But it is clear that a term which includes both the study of human anatomy and the study of abstract metaphysical first principles has not undergone its final stage of definition. Something more precise is needed than simply 'thinking'. In our own day philos-

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[24] *Introduction à l'histoire de la Philosophie*, p. 61.

[25] Plato, *Republic*, 480.

[26] *Biographia Literaria*, p. 72.

[27] *Some Problems of Philosophy*, p. 15.

ophy may be said to have gained for itself a more precise definition and an even wider scope. During the nineteenth century it freed itself from particulars and yet retained a quality of all-inclusiveness, comprehending all that from time to time had been the subject of individual research collected and digested into general notions. The particulars from which philosophy freed itself became History, Natural Science, Anthropology, Politics and the rest. They are no longer regarded as *part* of philosophy; and yet it may claim to include them all, for they are included, not as particulars, but in their universal aspect. Particulars are, by philosophy, regarded *sub specie aeternitatis*, that is in their proper proportions when combined with the whole of human experience. Philosophy, from a mere abstract term of artificial all-inclusiveness, comprehending all man's mental activity (as it was to Aristotle), has become the *interpreter* of all our mental activities, the unifying principle of all learning. In this way it has created not so much a new study, as a new attitude to all study. A philosophical enquiry is 'a study of something as a whole and for its own sake.'[28] Philosophy enquires whether there be a rational whole, and if so, what is its nature. It seeks to formulate a '*theoria*' of the whole universe, it is a systematic enquiry into the ultimate nature of Reality.

THE 'THEORIA'

13. What are the implications of this definition of philosophy? Its moving principle is, we have seen, an appetite for Unity. It desires to know the rational whole; to relate every part of our experience to every other part, and to relate the present to all that has gone before, for, as Descartes has said, the true nature of things '*est bien plus aisée à concevoir lorsqu'on les voit naître peu à peu que lorsqu'on ne les considère que toutes faites.*'[29]

If it is to present a true '*theoria*' of the universe philosophy must

> Grasp the sorry scheme of things *entire.*

Not trusting to a first glance, it seeks for difference beneath similarity, and similarity beneath difference, alternately uniting what the vulgar separate and separating what they unite. While all facts are isolated to the inattentive eye, they bind and connect themselves beneath the gaze of philosophy. While desiring what is true and what in each case really exists, and reducing the innumerable facts of Science and History to a grammar of life, and seeking in these principles of being the one master principle, the Unity, philosophy explains also the accidental elements of life. It must not only understand what it accepts and appropriates for its purposes, but also all that it rejects; it must explain not only the universe external to itself, but also its own place within the universe. So, too, nothing must be rejected out of sheer caprice, for philosophy must account for everything. 'There may be eclectic philosophers, but there never was an eclectic philosophy.'[30] It must explain things as it finds them. Its concern is not with the mental comfort of men, it does not desire to give men hope or certainty – these things it gives if it can, but it is never bound to do so. Its trust is '*voir clair, être dégrisé, se rendre compte.*'[31] These are the qualities required to make a '*theoria*' of the universe, this it is to be a philosopher.

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[28] Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, p. 1.

[29] op. cit., p. 47.

INTELLECT

14. It may not be possible, as psychologists assure us, to draw a sharp distinction between our faculties, but it will always remain true that philosophy depends wholly upon man's intellectual faculty – his faculty of reason. It will be noticed that in both the definitions I have given philosophy was spoken of as man *thinking*. The word is here used, as I shall always use it, in its most precise meaning – not the 'absolute thought' of Spinoza, but what he calls simply 'intellect.' And indeed, this is implicit in the idea of a systematic enquiry. Our intellect is our one faculty of knowing which is able to reduce what it understands to a systematic whole: the natural working of our intellect is in the mode of geometry. It demands that all evidence shall be of the same nature, that is, of a nature which can be understood by the mind and made part of the mind's system. But it is contrary to all experience that the evidence of 'intuition', for instance, can ever be made to form a systematic whole. This evidence cannot be accepted as valid if our search is to be systematic. But philosophical enquiry (by definition) is systematic. Therefore philosophy cannot accept intuitive knowledge as valid evidence. Beliefs, to philosophy, are no more than anthropological facts, to be interpreted (like all else that *is*), to be accounted for, but not

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[30] H-F. Amiel, *Journal Intime*, ii. 37.

[31] Goethe, *Maxims*.

to be accepted as valid evidence for the thing believed in.[32]

LOGIC

15. The geometry of the intellect, its principles of valid reasoning, form the science of logic. Now, it is clear that logic is powerless to create anything the existence of which did not already lie in the facts which this science examines. Human reason, having reduced its principles of action to an exact science, and aided by this science, is able to recognize, compare and combine facts, but it can create none. 'Given a certain set of assumptions, there can be only one right conclusion, and that conclusion may be that no certainty is obtainable. The best logician is often the man who pronounces the materials to be insufficient.'[33] Thus, the intellect may be said to be capable of grasping only that which is already made. It possesses no power of creation. It is true that facts when examined in a proper perspective and proportion with other facts assume a new significance,[34] and it is the province of the intellect to carry out this process of combination and comparison, yet it is impossible for mind to go behind its own principles, for its conclusions to be truer than its data. Facts are its fatal limit.

ANALYSIS AND CLASSIFICATION

16. The usual work, then, of the intellect consists in analysis, classification, and synthesis. Nothing may be taken by philosophy as it appears, every phenomenon must be analysed, classified in the recognized classes of phenomena, and finally its place ascertained relative to all other phenomena. The system of classification consists partly of an unwritten code and partly of a recorded system of necessary distinctions, and it is wholly empirical. The so-called 'properties of matter' and 'laws of thought' are parts of this system, which has its sole origin in man's powers of observation. Thus, the analysis of an object is really the reduction of it to elements

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[32] 'I dare say you have observed that in every investigation of every kind – whether in our Scientific laboratories, or in our Courts of Law, or in our commercial dealings, or in our social activities – when ever we want the truth and nothing but the truth, we endeavour to secure conditions under which the operations of the intelligence are not hindered. So far from appealing to feeling, we desire a light which is "clear and calm". We observe, generalize, judge, reason; and however deeply our feelings may be disturbed or enlisted, we try to prevent them from assuming the role of *witnesses*.' Sir Henry Jones. op. cit., p. 18.

[33] Sir L. Stephen. *The History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*.

[34] Thus Renan in the 'Préface' to his *Vie de Jésus*: '*le talent de l'historien consiste à faire un ensemble vrai avec les faits qui ne sont vrai qu'a demi.*'

which are already known.[35] It may be that in the course of analysis some object is discovered which baffles all classification and it is then the task of philosophy to make a new class for it and similar phenomena. The analytical process is just that which a compositor follows when he is 'distributing' his type after printing. The boxes are there for the different letters, they have but to be transferred from the words in which they stand to their already labelled compartments; one letter 'e' may have been part of the word 'eel' and another of the word 'etymology', but when analysed – 'distributed' – they no longer possess this individuality, they are simply 'e's. Analysis is the reduction of a complex object into the more or less simple parts which it has in common with other objects.

It is not difficult to recognize this process as the 'historical method'. What is called at different times the 'scientific method', 'the historical method' and the 'psychological method', is really none other than simply the common method of human intelligence. The 'historical method' of enquiry can tell us what has happened, and on occasions it can offer a reason why it has happened, that is, it concerns itself with what *is* and cannot be truer than the facts it handles. From time to time – and never, perhaps, more than in our own day – men have placed implicit trust in this method of enquiry, but at the same time they have used it for purposes which it cannot truly fulfil.[36] What we shall have to enquire will be, not whether the historical method can tell us anything about what *is*, not whether the intellect is capable of collecting and ordering facts, for these things are manifest, but whether, possessing these powers, the process of the intellect has any validity in a question of what *ought to be* – that is, whether it is a valid process by which to discover Ultimate Right.

THE WILL

17. I have discussed the 'natural' attitude of the intellect towards the evidence it receives, but there remains the attitude which philosophy demands of the will. The three chief elements in this attitude are originality, disassociation and doubt.

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[35] cf. supra note 4.

[36] For instance, the 'psychological' explanations of the grounds of Political Obligation do this. What *is*, is confused with what *ought to be*.

(a) I have already indicated that the real meaning of originality is genuineness or independence. The quality which philosophy requires is a complete freedom of mind which knows no external restraining power. There is no more striking example of this than that afforded by the letters of Henry Oldenburg to Spinoza. 'Go forward', says Oldenburg, 'then, most excellent Sir, and cast aside all fear of giving offence to the pigmies of our day; the battle with ignorance and frivolity has lasted long enough.'[37] And again, 'I would have you throw off fetters of every sort.'[38] These are the words of a philosopher to a philosopher. But such a life requires great boldness: he writes later, 'Allow me, I entreat you, relying on the regard you bear me, to beg of you to let nothing appear in your treatise that might in any way be construed into a disregard of the religious virtues.'[39] This is not philosophy, for philosophy must never be timid. '*La philosophie, c'est la complète liberté de l'esprit, par conséquent l'indépendence de tout préjugé religieux, politique ou social. Elle n'est, au point de départ, ni chrétienne ni paienne, ni monarchique ni démocratique, ni socialiste ni individualiste, elle est critique et impartiale; elle n'aime qu'une chose: la vérité.*'[40]

(b) In order that its attitude towards all things shall be logical, impersonal, impartial, in a word, wholly reasonable, philosophy seeks to separate itself from the object it examines, to disassociate itself from any emotional contact with the thing. This is clearly essential to an intellectual judgement, for if philosophy allowed itself to enter into the object it would soon find itself preoccupied with the immediate phenomenon and unable to disengage itself sufficiently to see it in a proper perspective. If we are to make a '*theoria*' we must never for one moment allow ourselves to be captured by a particular object.[41]

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[37] Letter VII.

[38] Letter X.

[39] Letter XVIII.

[40] Amiel, op. cit., ii. 137. True philosophers will never be 'cranks'. If we have to disagree with the world's thought and practise on important points, it is well to conform on those which are unimportant. Renan, a true 'revolutionist', thought this. See his *Souvenirs de mon Enfance.*

[41] cf. supra note 32.

(c) 'The first step towards philosophy is incredulity.'[42] 'The philosophic doubt is the beginning of the search for truth.'[43] These are principles which no philosopher can afford to reject. It is a fundamental rule of all criticism which seeks the truth regardless of the consequences that it must remain in doubt where the evidence appears insufficient. From Descartes,[44] again, we learn the true principles of doubt. Philosophy doubts, not for doubting's sake, but so that it may find nothing but the truth. It is what Goethe calls 'an active scepticism which constantly aims at overcoming itself.'[45] Intellectual proof is the sole basis of all philosophical persuasion: the dividing lines between the certain, the probable and the doubtful must be drawn rigorously, and philosophy is better pleased when it has declared the evidence insufficient to form any conclusion, than when it has reached a conclusion without proper grounds.

LANGUAGE

18. The true sociability of man is nowhere more clearly seen than in his inherent desire to share what he has learnt or discovered. Timid folk from time to time in the world's history, seeing the necessity in man for freedom to think, have imagined that they might limit the uncomfortable effects of thought by forbidding freedom of speech at the same time as they grudgingly allow a certain liberty to think.[46] But this is mere delusion; freedom of thought necessitates freedom of speech, the one cannot exist without the other. Truth can only prevail in battle; if it cannot conquer in the field it will never conquer. So it is that when the philosopher has made his '*theoria*' of man's whole experience, when he is satisfied in his own mind, he seeks to inform his fellows of his discovery. This he may do in many different ways, and as a rule he will do it by all possible means. Yet, as a philosopher, he is pledged to do it in one particular way – I mean, by some systematic treatise setting forth in all possible fullness the whole import of his thought. He may – nay, he must if he be honest – express himself in his life; but this will always remain but a

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[42] Diderot, last conversation, quoted in Morley, *Diderot and the Encyclopaedists.*

[43] Bacon, *Novum Organum,* XCII.'

[44] op. cit., pp. 29, 36. And *Les principes de la Philosophie,* § 43.

[45] Goethe, *Maxims,* 340.

[46] The error of those who think that 'free thought' is a guarantee of right thought is even more gross. Thought cannot be right except it be free, but it may easily be free without being right.

fragmentary expression liable to many misunderstandings. To those who surround him, and whom, perhaps, he has a share in educating, he will be able to show a more complete outward expression of his thought, as did Spinoza to those with whom he lodged;[47] yet he is bound to *speak*, and the particular use to which he puts language is significant of his whole attitude. In general, it may be said that philosophy makes the same use of words as do ordinary men in ordinary circumstances. That is to say, either philosophy says what it means or it defeats its own ends. In conversation we are accustomed to pay our chief attention to the meanings which words contain: the words we use are aimed to express the whole of our meaning within themselves, they are the rational expression of a rational thought. Now, to many this is the only use of language, but it is easy to give an example of words used in a different manner. Think, for instance of some 'pet name' or homely epithet which in itself contains no rational meaning at all – or if it does, this meaning is definitely laid aside.[48] Language has taken on a new task; this we shall examine later, but the attitude of philosophy in the use of language cannot be too firmly insisted upon. Clearly, if it is to remain consistent with itself, philosophy cannot admit the validity of any use of words other than that which is designed to express a rational thought by means of the *meaning* of those words. Other uses of language may have their place, but they cannot express a rational idea and so far as philosophy is concerned they must always remain untruthful.

EXAMPLE OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL ATTITUDE

19. In concluding this examination of the nature of philosophy it may be well to give a single concrete example of the way in which it would approach a particular problem or object, and perhaps we could not do better than to examine its attitude towards a flower. Philosophy cannot, without betraying itself, run into a field, pluck a flower and treasure it as a word of God. In the first place it must disassociate itself from the immediate object so as to place it in its proper perspective. To philosophy nothing is isolated. The fact of the flower it cannot reasonably doubt, and so soon as this is

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[47] See Colerus, *Vie de Spinoza*.

[48] Whose mother has not called him a dove, or a lamb, or a duck? And how wholly would an etymologist be misled if he were to attempt to trace the derivation of these epithets!

established its immediate concern with any particular flower is no longer pressing.[49] But there will yet remain many things to doubt, and these philosophy now seeks to elucidate. There must be no timidity in the enquiry, it must follow where thought leads it, not fearing to wound the feelings of humanity by saying that many of our beliefs about flowers are merely illusory. At the same time the enquiry must be systematic. Philosophy will not come to the flower as a gardener, a botanist, a chemist or a child, but it is part of its business to examine and account for these several attitudes, and by their aid to determine the full significance of the flower within the totality of experience. It is not with a view to the elevation of mankind that philosophy studies the flower, but simply for its own sake, in order to discover the truth about what really *is*. There can be no 'God and man' in a flower to philosophy: it will not understand Dr Arnold's saying that 'wild flowers are my music' – this is mere fancy. And finally, it will seek to express its conclusions in the meaning of the words it uses. Flowers are flowers, and we must mean what we say. Philosophy cannot go about the woodlands in blossoming time

> To see the cherry hung with snow

For, in this instance, neither the word 'hung' nor the word 'snow' would convey to it any rational meaning.

III. POETRY

THE 'END' OF POETRY

20. There are those – and they are not few – who hold a view of poetry which I cannot but call curiously hedonistic. Poetry, they say – and they are in company with Wordsworth – has but one obligation, it must please.[50] To many of those who hold this view poetry is little more than a mere rhapsody of words which, if it be great poetry, will excite within us the most lively feelings of pleasure and satisfaction. In the opposite direction are those who, it seems in protest against this view, hold that poetry is 'essentially a criticism of life.' Poetry is the greatest and most complete

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[49] Even Berkeley would not doubt this.

[50] It is but a small step from this to the Utilitarian conception of art expressed in Bentham's words – 'Prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry. If the game of push-pin furnishes more pleasure, it is more valuable than either.'

way of expressing ideas; and to give expression to ideas is its end. As we saw in the case of philosophy, definitions often hint a larger truth than they actually contain; and in these contradictory views of the nature and end of poetry we may, I think, find the one truth which is behind the two forms. If we were to ask a great poet what idea he had endeavoured to represent in any one of his poems, he would be at a loss to know what to reply – as was Goethe when confronted with the question.[51] The notion of a definite idea to be expressed is wholly foreign to art; but is it necessary to fly to the opposite extreme and declare that it has no end beyond immediate pleasure? Ideas are things of the mind, but poetry is of the spirit. The true poet presents us with no problems, art and propaganda are eternally separated. But there are 'ideas' of the spirit which come to us in the way in which the emotion of pleasure comes, voices which are silent yet which speak, spiritual ideas which are not rational or cognizable by the mind. We may derive pleasure from a poem, we may draw from it ideas, but the poet seeks to produce neither of these. He seeks to evoke within us a feeling of the reality of what is spiritual and of the poor shadowiness of even the greatest forms of expression. Poetry does not propagate ideas, but an immediate feeling and intuition of spirit: the artist's life is a great conspiracy – not for the overthrow of earthly governments and thrones[52] – but for the establishment of the dominance of the spirit. Poetry seeks to reveal Reality, in a manner wholly different from philosophy, yet occupies itself in this quest and in no other

> As I declare our poet him
> Whose *insight* makes all other's dim:
> A thousand poets pried at life
> And only one amid the strife
> Rose to be Shakespeare.

I have used, and shall continue to do so, the word poetry to represent all art; what I shall say of this form of expression will apply equally to all other forms. The painter and the sculptor, the poet and the musician each have methods which are peculiar to themselves, yet, as we saw in philosophy, there is a body of general principles common to all art, and it is with these that I would concern myself. But there is a yet wider term which seems to me to embrace the whole range of this side of man's activities. We may call it Mysticism or Religion. All art is mystical, all art is religious – in principle. The keenest appreciation of Beauty, the deepest understanding of the things of the spirit of which the artist always speaks, the most lively experience of the 'realms of gold' cannot be stirred within a man except he be, in the profoundest sense, religious. This penetration into Reality is essentially a religious act, and religion comprehends both the desire, which man finds within himself, for some spiritual reality subsisting behind the forms of time and place, and the means by which this desire may be satisfied.

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[51] *Conversations* (Sup), Sunday May 6th 1827. He remarked that 'the Germans are, certainly, strange people. By their deep thoughts and ideas, which they seek in everything and fix upon everything, they make life much more burdensome than is necessary.'

[52] Some poor souls think that this idea was ever in the mind of Shelley!

I shall attempt no definition of poetry. Indeed there is a peculiar difficulty in stating any positive principles of the poetic art, for its methods – and *a fortiori* poetry itself – are not wholly susceptible to analysis; and yet if we are to follow the philosophic method we must examine the evidence of the poets themselves, and seek to discover upon what hidden principles it is that they work.

METHOD

21. I have spoken of poetry as *seeking* Reality, but the word cannot here be used in the same sense as when we speak of philosophy seeking. To philosophy the quest is a gradual cumulative process by which evidence is collected, arranged, tested and finally unified. It is the ordinary finite process of the mind. But with poetry all is different. There is no beginning and no end in its quest, a week's search will not bring it nearer than the work of an instant. Poetry knows Reality all at once; process is foreign to its method. A poet may mature, his genius may gradually find itself, but he will never be nearer to Reality than when first he saw the world through the eyes of the spirit. Philosophy possesses, poetry is possessed by its knowledge. In other words, *poeta nascitur non fit*.[53] There are many things which a poet must learn, much will depend on his education, but his essential poetic power is beyond the reach of all external influence. Poetry is

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[53] This is true of everything in a certain sense. cf. supra note 4. Walton, *The Compleat Angler*, Ch. 1. 'Angling is somewhat like poetry, men are born so.' This principle is, I suppose, the true basis of the many doctrines of 'Election' and 'Predestination' which Christianity has known at one time or another.

not the product of democracy, as some think, or of wealth, prosperity, poverty, leisure, learning, nor yet of any human circumstance or physical fortune. Great poetry, sublimity, 'is the echo of a great soul.' Its inspiration comes not from the world as we see it, but from another world of which ours is but a shadow, to which ours is but a chaos. So then, what method it can show will be unconscious. Philosophy prosecutes its search on definite principles which it has always in mind, but poetry simply *knows* and knows not how it knows. It is preoccupied with the end, the means are those with which nature has equipped it and go unquestioned and unexamined. Before we can assert that we see we do not need to know the scientific explanation of how the eye perceives an object; so it is with poetry, the means of perception are such that any misuse is followed by an immediate cessation of power.

INTUITION

22. The foundation of all poetry is feeling. The only knowledge to which it can lay claim is intuitive, immediate knowledge. Its only means of acquiring knowledge is by inspiration. To attempt an explanation of the nature of inspiration would be futile; it is a fact to those who know it, and to those who do not explanation would convey none of its real meaning. It is something which must be known from the inside or not at all. This is the means of knowledge which Keats desired when he exclaimed 'O for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts.' To him, as to all poets, there was a tremendous 'gulf between what is reasoned and what is felt.'[54] He felt, and consequently knew, 'that another, lovelier world, tinted with unimaginable wonders, alive with ultimate music, awaited those who could free themselves from the fetters of the mind, lay down the shuttle and the weaver's comb, and reach out beyond the conceptual image to intuitive contact with the thing.'[55] This is common to all poetry. Shelley, in characteristic extravagance, speaks of his knowledge as

> Too deep for the brief fathom-line of thought or sense.[56]

And Meredith, in some ways the most intellectual of poets, says

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[54] J-F. Millet's phrase.

[55] Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, p. 17.

[56] Shelley, 'Epipsychidion'.

> I *feel* the truth; so let the world surmise.[57]

To all poets there is a real meaning in the contradiction between thought and emotion; intuitive knowledge is to them something foreign to the intellect:

> In such an hour of visitation from the most high God
> Thought is not, in emotion it expires.

This immediate apprehension is sometimes called *imagination*, a word, like so many, which has come down in the world, and now most commonly denotes mere fancy. But there is an essential difference between them which we shall discuss later. Suffice it to say that in its true meaning the word denotes this real and authentic spiritual power called inspiration. '*L'imagination est l'oeil de l'ame.*'[58]

If poetry claims for itself intuitive knowledge it cannot justify its claim by a logical argument: to do so would be a negation of its first assertion. So soon as poetry argues we may be sure that it is no longer poetry. 'In its true nature faith can be justified by nothing but itself.'[59] Arguments, so far from being added reasons for belief, are an absolute and final condemnation.

ASSOCIATION

23. Intuition can only operate by an immediate contact with the thing. In poetry what in logic are called subjective and objective are united. There is no observer and thing observed, both are one; the poet *is* the bird, the flower, the tree, the Pope (Browning in 'The Ring and the Book'), the ship (Coleridge in 'The Ancient Mariner'), and anything else to which he is able to join himself. And if this union does not take place there can be no poetry. Some say that nothing is real unless we think it is, that our thought is the measure of existence; but this advances beyond what is provable. What we can say – and it comes within the experience of most of us – is that nothing is real *to us* until what had seemed objective has become subjective. In this sense only is it true that reality is subjective. For example; Christianity is an objective fact. But it is true, real to those only who find it already within their heart, to those only to whom its message 'breathes such

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[57] Meredith, 'Modern Love', XLVIII.

[58] Joubert, *Pensées*, iii. 47.

[59] T.H. Green, 'Sermon on Faith', *Works*, iii. 263.

sense as their sense breeds with it.'[60] As a religion it is true without our acceptance, it has an ultimate truth quite apart from any human consciousness – but to us, if we do not find it already within our view, we shall attach it to our stock of 'reasoned beliefs' in vain. This is the nature of all religion, and so of all poetry; all genuine poetry is *poésie intime*. Thus, Shelley describes Panthea's union with Prometheus,

> I saw not, heard not, moved not, only felt
> His presence flow and mingle through my blood
> Till I became his life and he grew mine,
> And I was thus absorbed.[61]

And speaks of

> The poet's blood
> Which ever beat in mystic sympathy
> With nature's ebb and flow.[62]

While Francis Thompson says of the poet –

> For he, the conduit running wine of song,
> Then to himself does most belong,
> When he his mortal house unbars,
> To the importunate and thronging feet,
> That round our corporal walls unheeded beat;
> Till, all containing, he exalt
> His stature to the stars, or stars
> Narrow their heaven to his fleshly vault.[63]

This knowledge of the poet may be called the knowledge of *being*, in distinction from the knowledge of knowing which belongs to the philosopher.[64] The poet fails when he does not literally become what he contemplates, the philosopher fails when he so far loses himself in the object as to forget his '*theoria*.'

FAITH

24. This intuitive contact with the thing cannot take place if there exists in the heart of the poet anything in the nature of disbelief or doubt. Doubt is as wholly foreign to poetry as it is necessary to philosophy. There is nothing which so effectually deadens any power of spiritual perception as an

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[60] See again, supra note 4. And infra note 101.

[61] Shelley, 'Prometheus Unbound', Act II, Sc. 1.

[62] Shelley, 'Alastor'.

[63] Thompson, 'Contemplation'.

[64] This distinction is one made, implicitly, in Plotinus, 'On the Beautiful', *Ennead*, I.

unwillingness to believe. Faith, which is an attitude tuned to belief rather than to doubt, willing to trust rather than distrust, is a prevailing conviction of our nearness to the truth and is the essence of all inspiration. It is not more absurd to think that water can flow uphill than to think that imagination can operate while we preserve a critical attitude towards the object of our contemplation. Faith is a willingness to believe for the moment so that we may be able to grasp the whole entire. Coleridge has expressed this necessity of inner preparation of will by asserting that poetry must produce 'that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith.'[65] With the poet himself, will, in this matter, has been swallowed up in the power that moves him – for he is possessed rather than possesses – and yet without this initial attitude it would have been impossible for him to have awoken that power within himself. To the religious consciousness faith is the act of abandoning self so that a greater, truer Self might fill it and possess it; so, to poetry it is the act of surrender which permits the inflow of the Divine breath which is inspiration.

ASSOCIATION

25. In a sense, analysis is the result of the principle of systematic doubt followed by philosophy, and so is entirely foreign to poetry. It is the simple object as a whole, it is the thing itself to which the poet attaches himself. The evidence of the gardener, the botanist or the chemist – these are not even a part of the poet's knowledge, they are wholly outside his province: what he cannot find within himself, by giving himself to his object and becoming one with it, he will not understand. *'L'âme de la nature est divinée par le poet, le savant ne sert qu'à accumuler les matériaux pour sa demonstration.'*[66] Which finds Reality we shall discuss later.

Since the process of analysis is not the object of poetry, and since it depends for its knowledge upon feeling, it is clear that though it seeks Reality it cannot seek it systematically. As we observed above it is contrary to all experience that the evidence of intuition can ever be made to form a systematic whole. The philosopher, if he attains it at all, creates a whole from the scattered fragments of human experience, the universe to him is macrocosmic. But to the poet the whole is in each object; it is not in the great width of his observation and experience that he finds his harmony, but in the depth of his insight into one object which, whatever it be, is a microcosm of the All.

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[65] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, p. 161.

[66] Amiel, op. cit., i. 62.

NECESSITY OF EXPRESSION

26. Poetry seeks spirit. Whatever it touches is transformed, remade, is born again a reincarnation of the spirit which it breathes. The eye of poetry penetrates the husks and hangings which to our gaze surround the realities of life, seeking only that central, immanent beauty which is the life of all that the human eye can see or the human mind conceive. But spirit can only be seen by spirit; and the poet is unable to grasp this central reality of things until he has surrendered himself to the spirit which is within him, which alone has power to bring about that union of spirit with spirit which is inspiration. Inspired thus the poet is as one possessed, and the necessity which will move him to expression will be far more pressing than that experienced by the philosopher. Indeed, no human being is wholly free from a certain conformity to

> The fixed sad fashion of productiveness,

Which, in its divine counterpart is the only reason we can give ourselves for our existence or for the world's. Milton speaks with anguish when he finds, ere half his days are done, his 'one talent which is death to hide' lodged in him useless. And Tennyson can give no explanation, simply –

> I do but sing because I must
> And but as linnets sing.[67]

But how is he to express himself? The poet knows and understands what he sees, he has made himself analogous to the object he contemplates, but since he has no eye for anything but spirit he is at a loss to tell of it to us who hang upon his words with the longing of children for news of unknown lands; and the very fullness of his knowledge, the overpowering reality of his vision ties his tongue, defying all effort to speak a language intelligible to normal human moods. His words are well nigh meaningless to those who do not already know. He can but repeat, in his effort to enlighten us, that he *has* travelled in the realms of gold – '*et ego in arcadia fui, et ego in arcadia fui*' –

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[67] Tennyson, 'In Memoriam', XXI.

But a voice
Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless.

Words in their ordinary use fail him; if he attempts to describe what he has seen the result is but a hideous parody.

O speech!
How feeble and how faint art thou, to give
Conception birth. Yet this to what I saw
Is less than little.[68]

says Dante. And we remember that long-echoing cry with which Shelley ends his 'Epipsychidion' –

Woe is me!
The winged words on which my soul would pierce
Into the height of love's rare Universe,
Are chains of lead around its flight of fire, —
I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire!

The poet can find no means ready to hand by which to express himself. *He must turn creator.*

27. The spiritual reality is before the poet's eye – nothing else. He stands before a rose in bloom; the rose we see is an expression of its inner spirit, a shadow, a representation of spirit in material form. If he is to reexpress this spiritual reality, he has no other task than to create again the rose. Thus Browning says of the poet – CREATOR

He with a 'look you!' vents a brace of rhymes;
And in there breaks the sudden rose herself,
Over us, under, round us every side, —
Buries us in a glory young once more,
Pouring heaven into this shut house of life.[69]

And Shelley, —

He will watch from dawn to gloom
The lake-reflected sun illume
The yellow bees in the ivy-bloom
Nor heed nor see, what things they be
But from these create he can

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[68] Dante, 'Paradiso', XXXIII. T.E. Brown, in his very wonderful and beautiful poem 'Dartmoor: Sunset at Chagford', expresses some profound thoughts on this subject.

[69] Browning, 'Transcendentalism', in *Men and Women*.

Forms more real than living man,
Nurslings of immortality.[70]

If we read poetry as we read a prose description we shall entirely fail to reach its true meaning. To my mind there could be nothing further from the truth than Wordsworth's statement that 'there neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition.'[71]

MEDIATOR

28. So, then, the power of the poet transcends that of the mere narrator as the power of the creator of a new, natural object transcends that of him who can execute an accurate diagram of the thing created. This is his supreme office; he is not merely a teacher, not only a sayer of hard sayings, but a mediator. Not indeed a practicer of the enormities of an unholy priestcraft, but a true channel by means of which the spiritual reality of things comes home to us. His is no occult science, he is no necromancer, but

a priest to us all
Of the wonder and bloom of the world.[72]

He does not desire to reveal the spirit simply to those who can see for themselves, but, with a passion akin to the Divine Love, he strives to draw all men to their true ancestral home. The poet is one of ourselves, and yet also an inhabitant of that other lovelier world of spirit. He is at once the ambassador of the race to that land which to us is foreign, and a messenger from the realms of gold sent to guide us to our Rest. He is no more and no less than the *point d'appui* between the temporal and the eternal, the finite and the infinite. We prose folk, what are called normal men, have not that power of penetrating the forms of time and place, and if perchance we catch some fleeting glimpse of the Eternal Day we are blinded by its radiance and shamed by its purity,

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[70] Shelley, 'Prometheus Unbound', Act I. We have all seen on works of art – a cup or a plate for instance – an inscription such as 'Sam made me,' or on church bells, '*Albertus fecit me*'. This expresses the fact that the maker had *created* something which could own itself made by him.'

[71] Coleridge, too, rejects this statement as entirely inadequate. See *Biographia Literaria.*

[72] M. Arnold, 'Youth and Nature'.

> Blind fumblers that we be
> About the portals of eternity.[73]
>
> Yet some there be that by due steps aspire
> To lay their just hands on that golden key
> That opes the palace of eternity.[74]

These are our poets; theirs is a priestly function.

TRANSPOR

29. Poetry desires to give no information about the things of which its speaks – as we have seen, its word does not describe but create – and so it will never attempt to persuade men that it has found and knows Reality. In place of the power of persuasion it uses a power to transport its hearers to the Thing itself. In a way this is but the reverse side to its creative power, but in reality it is an added virtue recognized by Bacon when he attributed to it a power 'to raise and errect the mind'. This is well expressed in the words of Coventry Patmore –

> All forces of the sea and air,
> All interests of the hill and plain,
> I so can sing, in seasons fair,
> That who has felt, may feel again.[75]

Philosophy, we saw, uses words for the meaning they contain; but to poetry they have no intrinsic meaning – only a power to evoke in others a feeling which the poet himself has already known. Often to him the sound of a word has as much value as its meaning, often a word will convey to the reader a sense which is beyond all sense that this same word would contain in conversation. The expressive content of language is increased a thousandfold, but if we were not all poets in some measure we should see in this only a hideous misuse of one of the finest of man's acquirements. Poetry has discovered many ways of deepening the power of language; it does it by rhyme and by rhythm, by simile and by the discovery of hitherto unknown beauties of sound. It seeks to create an atmosphere of so powerful an influence as to set men free from themselves, that they may rise, transported on the wings of the spirit. *'Rien de ce qui ne transporte pas n'est*

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[73] C. Patmore, 'Semele'.

[74] Milton, 'Comus', opening speech.

[75] Patmore, 'The Angel in the House', I.ii.1.

poésie. La lyre est, en quelque manière, un instrument aile.'[76] For this reason Walter Pater has said that 'all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music.'[77] That is, it strives to attain the condition in which it can express the exquisite blend of matter with form, of meaning with expression, which is found perfected in musical composition.

DRAMATIC AND LYRIC POETRY

30. Different forms of poetry attain different degrees of success in the satisfaction of this aspiration, and we shall add to our understanding of the nature of poetry if we can determine which it is that reaches the highest point. Coleridge thought that dramatic poetry was the highest form of poetic art.[78] The dramatist has practised himself to look below the surface of our life and to single out those hidden forces and powers by which men are moved. These he examines, he accustoms himself to their method of operation, he makes himself familiar with those things which ordinary men, taking them for granted, do not bestir themselves to understand. He is seeking ever for the unity in life, the harmony which subsists at the heart of life's endless agitations; and his search leads him more and more to see that it is the little things that make or mar the life of men.[79] The key words to life are always small words, easily passed over in a hasty reading; and yet if we fail to recognize them the whole vast drama is well nigh meaningless. At the beginning of the play the key note is struck, and if we are not waiting with minds alert we shall miss this first intimation. The note will ring out into the valley, but, just as we had almost forgotten it, the mountains opposite will echo back the precious sound; and as the play draws to its close the echo will more constantly ring in our ears until we know that the note has sounded out of eternity and is bearing the things that are to their destined

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[76] Joubert, *Pensées*, XXI. 9. cf. Richter, *Levana*, § 38. 'How then is the child to be led into the new world of religion? Not by arguments. Every step of finite knowledge can be reached by learning and perseverance; but the Infinite, which supports the end of those steps can only be seen at a glance, not reached by counting; we arrive there by wings not steps.'

[77] Pater, *The Renaissance*, p. 140. Song, it seems to me, is the point at which poetry and music merge. Words gradually lose all meaning and become the notes of a melody. Wagner wrote sometimes the words to the music and sometimes the music to the words so little difference did he make between the two means of expression.

[78] In his *Table Talk*; but I cannot now find the passage.

[79] So the handkerchief in *Othello*, the fan in 'Lady Windermere' and the cyder mug in 'The Tragedy of Nan'.

issue. This is great drama: but what is it other than a true, a living '*theoria*' of human life? The dramatist presents us with an epitome of life, revealing to us its profound unity or its dismal chaos, as he has a mind. This however is not far removed from the task accepted by philosophy; at least it attempts far more, and with methods far other, than those we have ascribed to art. Dramatic poetry cannot easily claim to be the purest form of poetic expression.[80] The highest, because the purest, form of poetry is the lyric. In this, in its most successful moments, poetry itself has taken wings, its words have become the melody of a song, and it has attained the essential condition of music. All other forms of poetry have many aims besides its distinguishing one of increasing our contemplation of the Beautiful, but in the lyric the poet,

> By the instinct of sweet music driven,

has surrendered all desire save of freeing men from themselves and transporting them to the spiritual reality of things by creating a new expression of it before our eyes. If, then, we would understand the nature and power of poetry we would do well to seek it in the freest and most soaring example of its purest form – the lyric.

> Our wisdom speaks from failing blood,
> Our passion is too full in flood,
> We want the key of his wild note,
> Of truthful in a tuneful throat,
> The song seraphically free
> Of taint of personality,
> So pure that it salutes the suns
> The voice of one for millions,
> In whom the millions rejoice
> For giving their one spirit voice.[81]

This is that lyric power which is the soul of all poetry.

THE FORMALISM OF WORDS

31.[82] There is one further side to the transformation which poetry brings about in the use of language. In Shelley's words, 'it strips the veil of *familiarity* from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its forms.' In every-day use, words denote to the mind only the most ordinary function, the most commonplace aspect of the thing – with the exception of proper nouns they denote only *genera* – and so, instead of leading us even to the expression of the *thing* which already exists, they intervene between it and ourselves and conceal its actual form from our eyes; for we only see that which we have a mind to see. Words ordinarily give us a mere generality, an idea of what usually happens. But poetry cannot be restricted in this manner, 'it is a sword of lightning, ever unsheathed, which consumes the scabbard that would contain it.' In our use of language we are all inveterate formalists, and we have been so long in this state that it is difficult for us to look for reality other than in the forms and symbols, the words and expressions, which we have chosen for ourselves. But art has no other object than to brush aside these utilitarian symbols which veil, not only the thing, but even any given expression of it from our eyes. Thus simply by means of a new attitude the poet enables us to undo from our shoulders the burden of a perpetual *a priori* observation and expression of things, so that having stripped them of their familiarity we may come to know them with a truer intimacy. Thus we come to see the objects and phenomena of the universe in their native purity, with a vision undistracted by the complications of half true associations and wholly false prejudices.[83]

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[80] Shakespeare knew this. See how he has gathered up all the thought and emotion in 'Measure for Measure' in the lyric 'Take, O take those lips away.' Act IV, sc. 1.

[81] Meredith, 'The Lark Ascending'.

[82] The ideas expressed in this section I owe to M. Bergson.

IV. PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY FACE TO FACE

THE QUEST FOR REALITY

32. Let us gather up the loose threads of our argument. And it would be well to remind ourselves of the definition of Reality which we took as our criterion. 'I understand Reality to be that which is in itself and is conceived through itself: I mean that, the conception of which does not depend on the conception of any other thing from which it must be formed.' Philosophy, we have seen, strives to know and understand this Reality. Some philosophers have given up the enquiry as vain – nothing can be known, they say. Some have said that all is dark, all is difficult and dangerous, as yet nothing is certain – but we must press on. And others, again, have declared triumphantly that, by the means they use, Reality can be known, and that they know at least a large part of its nature.

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[83] M. Bergson is not considering what I have called the spiritual reality of an object, but simply any given expression of that spirit – any given physical flower or tree, for example.

But philosophy has gone on, and will continue to advance; the single clause of its total creed is that Reality may be knowable. Poetry and Religion, also, have answered to but one call, have pressed forward with but one impulsion – the call of Reality, the craving of the human heart for truth. While philosophers are building their systems, or declaring them unbuildable, Religion and Poetry, not with arrogance or in that pompous manner which conceals uncertainty, but quietly and with reverence, have said, 'I have a Friend, Him I know in truth for I have long dwelt with Him; He is Truth.' Let us examine the credentials which both philosophy and poetry come bearing in their hands.

ASSOCIATION AND DISASSOC ATION

33. Philosophy desires to cut itself off from any emotional contact with the object of its enquiry, for were it to seek such a union it would immediately sacrifice its impartiality. It can love only the final truth which is reached by a systematic process of the examination of what *is*. Poetry knows of no such process, the first thing it sees is the last thing, it knows Reality (that is, claims to know Reality) at a bound by an immediate intuitive contact with the thing. This is the contrast; and if Reality is to be known only by itself (as it is, by definition), it would seem that nothing short of an immediate union of observer and thing observed could produce the desired knowledge. The only complete knowledge will be a 'knowledge of being'. For this reason while poetry can say, 'this is what is', philosophy can only say, 'this is what I think about it'. Only then, by association can Reality be *known*, in any true sense.[84]

ANALYSIS

34. The analytical process, followed by philosophy, breaks each object up into the parts which it has in common with other objects. The aim is so to simplify each object as to find what may be called its essential properties. But these parts into which the object is broken are not always true 'parts'; often it is but an artificial dissection which ignores the real parts simply because they, being unique, are unclassifiable. Analysis can only divide objects into parts which approximate in sameness in very varying degrees,

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[84] Of course, the only conclusion we may draw from this or any other comparison of methods is that while one method is doomed to failure the other, *qua* method, *may* succeed. Whether or not it *does* succeed depends entirely on who uses the method.

individuality must be ignored. Plotinus[85] complains that 'scientific knowledge', the analytical process of the intellect, breaks up Reality and so makes its comprehension as a whole impossible. Thus analysis seeks for the meaning of a poem in the letters of which it is composed or, perhaps, in the 'grammatical parts', both of which are equally artificial and equally distant from the meaning of the poet. It is the enemy of life; its process is one which kills and is powerless to raise again to new life. '*L'analyse tue la spontanéité. Le grain, moulu en farine, ne saurait plus germiner ni lever.*'[86] The true conception of Reality cannot 'depend on the conception of another thing from which it must be formed.' Poetry, as we have seen, cares nothing for analysis; it desires only the soul, the thing itself, the truth behind the form. Its intuitive grasp can contain life itself, its fingers do not touch to kill but to feel the pulse of life beating at the centre. It carries with it no categories, and its conception of Reality does not depend on any other thing.

FAITH AND DOUBT

35. Faith we have defined as an act of self-surrender, that, having 'emptied all our self of self', we may be prepared for that union with Reality which we have seen is the only possible means of knowledge. It is the ability and willingness to recognize the something greater than ourselves, and with recognition to lose ourselves in it. This is forbidden to philosophy which can believe nothing unproven. To doubt is the only possible accompaniment of the process of analysis, it is the natural means of guarding against deception, it is no less than intellectual honesty itself. But faith, to poetry, is more than mere method, it is a foretaste of the truth itself, bringing within its vision the possibility of a whole and the means of grasping it. There is nothing magical in its workings; to those who possess it, it is the clear and natural way in which Reality must be sought – as obvious as that the eye sees or that the ear hears. Poetry has to guard against no illusions from without, it need not strive after genuineness and independence from prejudice – for these things are met only on the road by which the intellect travels. Poetry has no need of a road, it passes none by the way, for the conceptions of time and distance are wholly foreign to its quest. Its end is achieved so soon as the search is begun.

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[85] Plotinus, *Ennead*, VI. ix.

[86] Amiel, op. cit.

CREATION AND EXPRESSION

36. When philosophy has garnered its facts, has analysed, classified and made a whole of them, it expresses this whole in a philosophical system. This is an ordered treatise in which words are valued solely for the rational meaning they contain. Whatever it is which philosophy has to express – and we have seen reason to believe that it is not Reality – it can only tell us about it, it is limited to the narration in words of what it has seen in circumstance and fact. It possesses no power of creation, it cannot reclothe spiritual reality in a form more expressive than that in which it finds it, for, from beginning to end, all that it has known is the form. Philosophy explains and develops the meaning of form, but it is powerless to go behind. And, were we to assume that philosophy has known Reality, its very attempt to express it by means of conceptions other than itself would belie the supposition. But in this matter poetry is logical. It knows Reality by an immediate contact, and expresses this contact by reclothing the naked Thing with garments which cannot be mistaken for the Thing itself – which, in fact, act as an illumination rather than as an added obscurity. Thus comes about its office as a Mediator; not as a road which divides the Thing from us, but as a river which, if we will rest upon its flow, will bear us to the final end. Philosophy would persuade; but poetry is at once away and off into that other world of unchanging values whither it desires to bear us in a transport of certainty. Indeed, we know that if we have ever thought seriously about the source and meaning of our life, we are driven to appeal to considerations which are personal and mystical. Conclusive, categorical certainty rarely follows in the train of persuasion; rather, it is the child of an ecstasy which lifts us to the world of spirit where dwells naked Reality, 'for who can speak of eternity without a solecism, or think thereon without an ecstasy?'[87] Whenever in our lives we have been certain beyond all appeal, in that same moment we have been poets.

INTUITIO AND INTELLEC

37. If, then, our definition of Reality be accepted – and it seems a very minimum, without which the word would have no meaning at all – the philosophical method labours under some very pressing difficulties in its enquiry into the ultimate nature of reality. But let us turn our attention for a moment to the faculties themselves. The idea of logic in one

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[87] Browne, *Religio Medici*, p. 13.

form or another is the basis of intellectual perception: but when we possess truth by a logical process it is as if we held in our hands a well-corded and sealed box enclosing precious things of which we have neither the sight nor the touch. We may, indeed, affirm that we possess them since we possess the box which contains them, but it is no possession worth the name. The truth is that the knowledge of the intellect is strictly limited to knowledge *about* the things it studies; it is wholly from the outside. As Spinoza says; 'Intellect, finite or infinite, in actuality, must comprehend the attributes of God and the modifications of God and nothing else.'[88] God Himself, Reality is beyond its grasp or knowledge. When we say we know something about a thing we mean that we have understood its appearance, qualities, properties, powers, characteristics, limits and the rest of its attributes. All this we may learn without ever having seen or known the thing itself. There are many of us who have a tolerably accurate knowledge about the Panama Canal. We know, perhaps, where it is, who owns it, who planned it, how many men gave their lives to its completion, how deep, how wide it is, how many ships pass through it annually, and the rest of the ascertainable information – but are we any nearer to knowing it? When asked, many of us could produce some information about the sunset, but what we know about it is not what we most admire, nor what has the power of making glad our souls. Those who have never gone beyond the information they can gather about the sunset have never known – or for that matter, never seen – a sunset at all.[89] We may be able to count up the good characteristics of our friends, but were we to do so to the end of time we should never deduce why we love them. William James wrote a book on *Varieties of Religious Experience*, but he never imagined that by this scientific enquiry he could present us with the necessary equipment for becoming mystics ourselves, or even for knowing *all* about them. Will a study of the poetic method enable us to become great poets? Is there no difference between a religious man and a Professor of Theology, between a moral man and a Moral Philosopher? It would not seem impossible for the best moral philosopher to be at the same time the most wholly immoral man in the world. Moral philosophy is not morality and can never make us moral: our knowledge about a thing in no way renders probable our spiritual possession of it.[90] This fundamental truth has no better expression than in the words of Mr. F.H. Bradley, –

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[88] *Ethics*. Pt. I, Prop. XXX. See supra note 16.

[89] 'A hundred men can talk for one who can think, but a thousand men can think for one who can see.' Ruskin.

> All philosophy has to do is to 'understand what is', and moral philosophy has to understand morals which exist, not to make them or give directions for making them. Such a notion is simply ludicrous. Philosophy in general has not to anticipate the discoveries of the particular sciences nor the evolution of history; philosophy has not to make a new religion or to teach an old one, but simply to understand the religious consciousness; and aesthetic has not to produce works of fine art, but to theorize the beautiful which it finds; political philosophy has not to play tricks with the state, but to understand it; and ethics has not to make the moral world, but to reduce to theory the morality current in the world...In short, the view which thinks moral philosophy is to supply us with particular moral prescriptions confuses science with art, and confuses, besides, reflective with intuitive judgment. That which tells us what in particular is right or wrong is not reflection but intuition.[91]

'To understand what is' – the task, as we have seen, which is common to all the activities of the intellect, to history, to psychology and to natural science as well as to philosophy. If, then, the intellect is to find Reality it must do so by means of a study of things as it finds them in this world. In St Paul's phrase, it must understand the 'invisible things' by means of the 'things that are made.' There are two objections to this position. In the first place, we established at the beginning of this essay that Reality, the Thing, is not its activities and cannot be wholly known through them. And in the second place, our knowledge of the things that are is so faulty and is likely to remain so faulty as not to warrant our drawing any conclusions from it. For example, when Berkeley produced his theory of Reality saying that no physical object really exists, no serious attempt was made to answer him; as a contemporary line of verse has it –

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[90] Those, for instance, who think that knowledge about sexual matters will preserve from immorality, forget this truth. And the results are disastrous. Knowledge is *not* power.

[91] Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, pp. 174-5.

> And Coxcombs vanquish Berkeley by a grin.

The Scottish Common Sense school alone took up the challenge, but their refutation was simply an attempt to laugh him out of court. How absurd a thing to suppose that this table which I touch is not real! Sheer common sense revolts against the notion, it is no more than academical nonsense! And yet, is not this the same argument which the opponents of Galileo and Copernicus used against the propounders of notions equally ludicrous? How absurd to suppose that the sun does not move round the earth – do we not *see* it all the day long! And so it goes on, and for all we know will continue so. Our knowledge of appearances, the things we speak of as existing, has in it no element of certainty at all: no century passes without our having to revise our knowledge about these things. And even if we lacked such instances of the failure of our knowledge we should still be without any kind of proof that it is unimpeachable. How then can we hope to find Reality from an observation of things as we see them? Says Dante,

> And who art thou that on a stool wouldst sit
> To judge at distance of a thousand miles
> With the short sighted vision of a span?

FANCY AND IMAGINATION

38. If, then, our definition of Reality has in it any element of truth, it appears that the claim of the intellect to know Reality has no real foundation. Apparently there is no alternative to the adoption of a sceptical, or at least agnostic, position. From the point of view of the intellect there is indeed no alternative, but we have yet to consult the claims of poetry. Poetry claims to be able to join itself to Reality. We have all experienced that at the times when we are stirred by matters of our deepest concern, when we long for comfort, for assurance, for inspiration or for renewal of strength, it is not to the philosophers that we turn, but rather to the poets. These moments will not find their kin in words of consolation, in arguments and reasons; it is because poetry is more than words, because poetic expression breathes a far deeper truth than words can contain, that the poet at these times is our

prophet.[92] Yet can we be certain that this is not all fancy? Poetry can give us comfort, but can it give us Truth? We know the delight to be got from the contemplation of a beautiful object when we have outstripped the mind and its measurement of value – but can we expect more than delight? In a word, is the claim of poetry to find Reality justified? By the method it uses it has seemed probable that poetry *may* find Reality, but *does* it? Browning thinks how hard it is to disbelieve when we are surrounded with so many inducements to belief –

> How can we guard our unbelief,
> Make it bear fruit to us? – the problem here.
> Just when we are safest, there's a sunset touch,
> A fancy from a flowerbell, some one's death,
> A chorus ending from Euripedes[93]

But are we justified in depending on these things for our knowledge of the Truth? Ought we not to doubt ourselves? Ought we not to doubt honestly? These are the questions which we must ask ourselves. And there is no real answer. 'In its true nature faith can be justified by nothing but itself.' This is a fundamental principle. It would be futile to attempt to prove that poetry knows Reality. All we can possibly say, in argument, is that poetry claims to know Reality, follows a method which makes it inherently probable that it will attain its end, and, finally, that the poet himself is satisfied. And yet there is one more thing we may say; we may remove one very great cause of doubt. Poetry teaches that Reality can only be known by the intuition, that it may only be felt. In Pascal's words, 'it is the heart which experiences God, and not the Reason.' But it does not say that we should believe all that our heart tells us. The heart alone can know the Truth, but the heart in all its moods is not infallible.

> God's voice is of the heart. I do not say,
> All voices therefore of the heart are God's.
> And to discern the voice amid the voices
> Is the hard task that we are born to.

says Clough. But how are we to distinguish the truth? Poetry knows that there is such a thing as mere fancy, and is on its guard against it. But in the main it is not the poet who is subject to fancies, but we who are not poets.

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[92] Cf. Job, 6: 25–6.

[93] Browning, 'Bishop Blougram's Apology'.

> A poet never dreams;
> We prose folk do: we miss the proper duct
> Of thoughts on things unseen.

Any one who has ever known the meaning of inspiration, will know that it is something far other than mere fancy: and indeed from outside observation, the two can be seen to be distinct; it can only be a poor observer who confuses them. 'You bid me distrust this internal assent', says Rousseau in a letter, 'but I find in it a natural safeguard against the sophism of my understanding. And I fear that on this occasion you are confusing the secret inclinations of our heart which lead us astray, with the more secret, more inward voice, which reclaims and murmurs against these interested decisions, and brings us back, in spite of ourselves, to the way of truth.' This is the explanation that any poet would offer; it is the common experience of men of feeling.

THE PLACE OF PHILOSOPHY

39. In saying that Reality can be known only to the intuition we must beware of giving the impression that we are thereby putting this knowledge onto the supernatural plane. In this sense of the word there is no such thing as the supernatural plane. In examining the intellect and the intuition we are examining two of man's natural faculties – and the one is not more natural than the other. It is a proper economy of man's faculties that we desire; and so we should not conclude before we have considered what is the true end and place of philosophy.

Immediately we begin to apply our minds to the question what are the objects appropriate to the intellect as opposed to those cognizable by the intuition alone, we encounter the extreme difficulty of making any precise distinction. Indeed, it seems only possible to give an answer in very general terms. That there are such objects we are very well aware. For example, such an 'intuitional' treatment of political questions as is advocated by Benjamin Kidd is, we are sure, wrong. It would be a misuse of the intuition if a Judge or Juryman were to wait upon it to decide some question of fact. And yet L.P. Jacks has given us a picture, which does not seem inherently unreal, of a shepherd who discovered by intuition a theory similar to that of Mendel. The most we can say is that questions of fact, questions concerning what is, are legitimate subjects for treatment by the intellect; but in all questions it is *possible* for the intuition to arrive at the truth. But philosophy has a deeper use than this; though it cannot hope to know Reality, it yet has a place in the quest for Reality. When we are confronted with a man who boasts that he is unlearned, that he is simple as a child and therefore possesses the Truth, there often arises in us a revulsion of feeling. Surely the many wise ones that the world has known are more than mere fools? And when we look into the life of a Spinoza, for example, we find in this man of intellect no intellectual pride, but a true simplicity of character, no arrogance such as is often met with in the proud unlearned, but a true humbleness of mind, a lively consciousness of the greatness of life, of the tremendous questions that confront man, of the poverty of man's intellectual equipment to measure the whole of Reality. There must be something soul-inspiring and ennobling in this pursuit of the mind if it is followed by men of such spiritual ardour.

> Sure He that made us with such large discourse
> Looking before and after, gave us not
> This capability and Godlike reason
> To fust in us unused[94]

Philosophical speculation is something more than a mere pastime, something more than a game of skill, it is by far the most important thing, the most noble thing that a man can do with his mind. And this not because of any material result which he will achieve (for he will achieve none) but because of the reaction which it will bring about in the soul. Philosophy reacts on our spiritual nature in two ways. First, it strengthens our power to distinguish between fancy and imagination. If the intellect cannot be used as a criterion whereby to judge the truths with which intuition presents us, yet it acts as a fire to purge and purify them. If we were to discard reason we should be throwing aside the most powerful balancing influence we possess. It is wrong to be proud of ignorance; it is towards a proper economy of his faculties that man should always be striving. Like convention in society,[95] which, though it possess no power to advance, can yet save us from degeneration, so the intellect, and indeed our whole physical nature, can enable us to distinguish between our own inclinations and that inner voice of God speaking in the heart, can save us from fanaticism, from a false mysticism and a perverted spirituality. Secondly; so soon as the intellect is engaged on the hopeless task of making a '*theoria*' of the universe we begin to realise its true limitations, and this realization leads us to look beyond ourselves. Shall we blame our reason for its weakness? 'Philosophy indeed cannot immortalize us, or free us from the inseparable attendants on this state, Ignorance and Error. But shall we malign it, because it entitles us not to an Omniscience?...Compleat knowledge is reserved to gratifie our gloried faculties. We are ignorant of some things from our special incapacity; of more from our contracted depravities: and 'tis no fault of the spectacles, that the blind man sees not.'[96] Its very limitations are our spiritual strength; for reason leads us to recognize an infinity of things beyond itself, it engages the mind on one of those hopeless yet ennobling quests in which when at last failure comes we find it turned to victory. '*Il est bon d'être lassé et fatigue par l'inutile recherche du vrai bien, afin de tendre les bras au libérateur.*'[97] Philosophy is the history of man groping for something greater than himself; not content with the consciousness that he must seek his true spiritual home in another world than this material world, man turns his mind also in this direction and seeks to convert even those most finite parts of his structure to this search which alone glorifies life and makes it great. Anything which produces in us a sense of our weakness helps us to make the first step on the way which to walk in *is* strength; and of all the pursuits which are followed by men none has produced in the human consciousness so deep a spirit of humbleness and so humble a spirit of greatness as has philosophy. 'Surely the aim of true philosophy must lie not in futile efforts towards the complete accommodation of man to the circumstances in which he chances to find himself, but in the maintenance of a kind of candid discontent, in the face of the very highest achievement; the unclouded and receptive soul quitting the world

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[94] 'Hamlet', Act IV, sc. 4.

[95] There is attached to the back of farm waggons in Sussex a wooden bar – called a 'scrotch peg' – which prevents the waggon from running backwards down a

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hill. This, it has always seemed to me, is the chief function of most of our conventions in society.

[96] Joseph Glanville, *An Apology for Philosophy*.

[97] Pascal, *Pensées*, 422.

finally, with the same fresh wonder with which it entered the world still unimpaired, and going on its blind way at last with the consciousness of some profound enigma in things, as but a pledge of something further to come. So we might understand how one might look back upon our life here, and its excellent visions, as but the portion of a race-course left behind him by a runner still swift of foot.'[98]

But will philosophy consent to be 'placed' in this manner? I think not. All we have done is to indicate what it is of permanent value that philosophy accomplishes. This it will achieve whether or not it confine itself to its proper sphere; and it seems probable that it will do so best while it attempts more than it is able to conclude. We have it in us to search for Reality with the mind, and none will cure us of this habit. Failure will not daunt, impossibility will not deter; while we have a mind we must wring from it its utmost capacity, and to do this we must attempt more than we can achieve. These are facts of human nature which all proof of unreasonableness leaves and will leave undisturbed.

V. CONCLUSION

RELIGION

40. On an earlier page we noted that the idea of philosophy has been subject to a gradual process of definition by which it has been freed from its incidental relationship with other ideas. In this manner its meaning and true scope has become apparent with ever increasing distinctness: and it is a process which is not yet completed. It will be seen that this process is none other than that which seeks for a proper economy of man's faculties. The differentiation of the idea of philosophy is part of a universal process of differentiation which takes place in all our activities and ideas. So far from being disrespectful, it is the very mark of life – so soon as it ceases to operate in any of our activities, that activity may be counted moribund. The carpenter gradually differentiates between the uses of his tools; the greater the number of tools he possesses the more specialized are their uses – and this promotes efficiency. Because we do not consider that might is right, that physical strength can demonstrate moral right, do we then no longer prize physical strength? Rather we use it for what it is worth in our world of moral values, we use it in its

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[98] Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, ii. 220.

proper place and glory in its use. So too with mind. In the spectacle of philosophy seeking to capture Reality with the mind we see a picture of children, ignorant of the true use of their faculties, trying to catch smoke in their hands. Our knowledge of God, as Kant clearly saw, is the product of the moral consciousness, and not of science or metaphysics. It is not reason but feeling which determines our idea of God. This is why religion and poetry, on this point, outweigh philosophy.[99] And we cannot insist too strongly on the fact that the proofs and arguments which philosophy brings are to religion as if they were not, they are invalid, they are no added evidence – if perchance they seem to corroborate an intuition – of the truth which has been felt. Our race has known but *one* God during the whole of its existence – the God of the human consciousness. Men in different ages have adduced different reasons, 'proofs' why they believe in a God, but these have never been more than justifications of a belief already in their heart. Kant was said to have 'killed the God of the Deists',[100] but this is true only in a very limited sense; for if he had literally killed the God of the Deists he would have killed the only God the human race ever knew. As external proofs of the existence of God, what are known as the ontological and cosmological proofs could not, indeed, stand before Kant's Critique. But if we believe in a God, if we know Him in our hearts, these 'proofs' stand and will continue to stand; not indeed as proofs, but as expressions of the way in which the heart of a believer can find the hand of God at work in everything. There *is* evidence of God in the physical world, in the universe, in every beautiful thing, but valid evidence only to those who already know God in their hearts.[101]

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[99] Let it not be supposed that I confuse aesthetic appreciation with religion. For the purpose of this essay I chose Poetry because it affords the purest and best literary evidence of the *way* in which our intuitive nature operates. I have, throughout, been examining *methods*. Where Religion goes beyond Poetry, as such, is that it declares its oneness with a God, not merely with a spiritual world. Though in a principle poetry and religion are identical, in result they may, and often do, differ. And this is the justification, I suppose, for such a term such as 'religious poetry'.

[100] '*Il tue le Dieu des déistes*.' H. Heine, in M De Stäel, *De l'Allemagne*, quoted in Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution Française*, p. 424, note 2.

The history of Religion is, in one aspect, the history of the differentiation of our idea of the sacred. Many are the expressions which this idea has received from time to time, but each in turn has been discarded in favour of one purer and more definite. It was centuries ago when what appears to us – if we be Christians – the true satisfaction of this craving of man was first completely expressed. Men had been groping for it in ages of darkness, and in the hours when the half-light of dawn gave new hope, and made also new demands – for men have never risen but on the bodies of their dead selves. Prophets the world over were teaching a truer idea of the sacred, while to the Hebrews came a revelation more sure than all the rest. But this even is final only in principle. Not until all men have grasped the objective fact of Christianity, taken it within themselves, dwelt upon it, and in the end been made one with it, is finality reached. The fact clothes the truth in material garments and men worship these poor hangings of a day, but the perennial task of religion is to strip the spirit of forms no longer understood, no longer expressive, to take the spirit within its own consciousness, to KNOW it, to become one with it, and then to reclothe it again with living forms which shall not stand between the beholder and the spirit within.[102] The history of religion is the history of the transformation by man of the objective fact into the subjective truth.

Religion gives but one answer to all our questions. It says ever – look not to find Reality, God, in books, nor in ceremonies, nor yet in the reasons men will give you that He exists, that He governs or possesses or helps, for all these things are but shadows of the Truth. Look within; look into your own consciousness – if you do not find God there you will find

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[101] If we already know a person his outward appearance is often, to us, a perfect expression of his inner self. But the appearance without the previous knowledge, will more often mislead than speak true.

[102] It may be noted that this is like the argument used by Prof. A. Schweitzer, whose philosophy of History bears a marked similarity to that of Croce. Chronicle is dead history: if we wish to get at the truth we must make it live. The only true source of our knowledge of the life of Christ lies in actual communion with Him at the present time. We must experience the facts of history before we can win from them their truth. See, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, last Chapter, and Croce, *On History*.

Him no where. God is known only to the spirit which is within man, for He is spirit and spirit may be known only by spirit.

> Truth is within ourselves; it takes no rise
> From outward things, whate'er you may believe.
> There is an inmost centre in us all,
> Where truth abides in fullness; and around,
> Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,
> This perfect, clear perception – which is truth.
> A baffling and perverting carnal mesh
> Blinds it, and makes all error: and to KNOW,
> Rather consists in opening out a way
> Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape,
> Than in effecting entry for a light
> Supposed to be without.[103]

If men attribute qualities to God, if men say He is like this or like that, if they give Him motives[104] – seek always to know the spirit, the experience, which has led them to say these things, for what they say is but a shadow of what they know. It is the experience alone which matters, all else exists but for an hour and passing away makes room for new and truer expressions. While the letter is eternally false the spirit is eternally true. So this desire for God has been expressed in many ways, the ways have grown old – the desire remains, 'For Thou hast made us for Thyself and our heart is restless till it rest in Thee.'[105] The idea of the supernatural was an expression of this desire, but an inadequate one. It was an attempt to open up a short cut to union with God. But the truth is there, as always. Supernature in the sense of something apart from, contrary to, nature is a false idea which is slowly dying; but in the sense that nature is a shadow, that phenomena merely body-forth the true spiritual reality and that they are not reality itself, it is true – and this was the experience that men strove to express, and which we must express anew and better. So too what is called Spiritualism is a false expression of a true idea;[106] and likewise, through the attempt to find God by the way of pure reason[107] shines the permanent craving of the human heart to know God. This alone is satisfied by some religious experience, the nature of which is the same as that of poetry, all else is but straining the eyes, which were never meant for such a task, into the surrounding darkness. But to religion there is no darkness at all; it knows, and cares not who questions its qualification to know. 'Hear again the vehement expression of mysticism. "When reason tells thee 'thou art outside God', then answer thou, 'No, I am in God, I am in heaven, in it, in Him, and for eternity will never leave Him. The devil may keep my sins, the world my flesh; I live in God's will, His life shall be my life. His flesh my will; I will be dead in my reason that He may live in me, and all my deeds shall be His deeds."'[108] We may say, if we will, that 'mysticism, a supposed communion with God in ecstasy, is a chronic delusion of the human heart',[109] but none will trouble himself about it less than the mystic. If we possess his 'knowledge of being' we can no longer remain in doubt. Philosophy may ask 'What is Truth?', and may strive to discover it by the way of pure reason. It is a long and noble struggle, doubt and difficulty beset its way, and even in human matters the probability of error is always greater than that of truth. But amidst all its desire after an intellectual proof, there have been men who have *known* all the time, who have been friends of the truth. These are the poets and mystics, who have desired only a union with Reality, an intuitive knowledge of God for its own sake, caring not at all for proofs and arguments, who claim to have *lived* in the light of that Eternal Day which knows no evening and no dawn.

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[103] Browning. 'Paracelsus.' I.iv.

[104] See St Augustine, *Confessions*, I. iv. Perhaps the finest expression of what God means to the soul to be found in all the literature of religion.

[105] ibid. I.i.

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[106] Spiritualism, we should remember, knew better days than those on which it has now fallen. See F.W. Myers, *Autobiographical Sketch*, for an account of what it meant to a really religious man.

[107] Sir Henry Jones, op. cit., p. vii. 'Let man seek God by the way of pure reason and he will find him.'

[108] Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, p. 293. He is quoting Jacob Boehme.

[109] S. Reinach, *History of Christianity*.

It is difficult to make a list of the books to which I am indebted, but, besides those quoted or refered to in the essay, I have had the following in mind.

Aristotle, *Ethics* and *Poetics.*
Bacon, *Advancement of Learning.*
__ *Novum Organum.*
Balfour, *The Foundation of Belief.*
__ *Essays Speculative and Political.*
Bergson, *L'Evolution Créatrice.*
__ *Le Rire.*
__ *Introduction to Metaphysics.*
__ *Dreams.*
Blackie, J.S., *Notes of a Life.*
Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State.*
__ *What Religion Is.*
__ *The Civilization of Christendom.*
Boullier, *Histoire de la Philosophie Cartesienne,* 2 vols.
Bradley, *Ethical Studies.*
__ *Appearance and Reality.*
Browning.
Butler, *Analogy of Religion.*
Carlyle.
Clutton-Brock, *The Ultimate Belief.*
Erskine, T., *Letters,* 2 vols.
Goethe, *Conversations.*
__ *Letters to Schiller,* 2 vols.
__ *Maxims.*
Holmes, E., *What is Philosophy?*
Huxley, *Method and Result. Essays,* vol. I
__ *Life of Hume*
Inge, *Outspoken Essays.*
__ *Christian Mysticism,* etc. It is impossible to enter the literature of Mysticism, both the works of the mystics themselves and of their commentators.
Jacks, L.P., *The Alchemy of Thought,* etc.
Jones, Sir H.
Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason.*
Keats, *Letters.*
Kidd, B., *Social Evolution.*
__ *The Science of Power.*
Lee, Vernon, *The Beautiful.*
Lessing, *Laocoön.*

Longinus, *On the Sublime.*
Newman, *The Grammar of Assent.*
Patmore, C., *Rod, Root and Flower.*
Plato.
Plotinus. I have used Boulliet's translation – *Les Enneads de Plotin*, 3 vols.
Renan, *Vie de Jésus.*
__ *Souvenirs de mon Enfance.*
Rousseau, *Emile* etc.
Ruskin.
Russell, B., *Mysticism and Logic.*
__ *Problems of Philosophy.*
Santayana, *The Life of Reason*, 6 vols.
__ *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion.*
Sensier, *Life of J-F Millet.*
Shelley, *Defence of Poetry.*
Stephen, K., *The Misuse of Mind.*
Watts-Dunton, *The Renasence of Wonder.*

It is impossible to put down the names of the poets to whose work I am indebted. And besides, it would be inappropriate, for we do not use our poets in the same way as we use our prose authors.

The three passages quoted in the front of the essay are intended to sum up the whole position. The first defines Reality. The second describes the only true way in which Reality may be expressed. The third gives the true use of the intellect in the search after Reality. As will be seen, they logically follow one another.

EDITORIAL NOTES

i LSE 1/1/33. Typescript with autograph corrections. Undated, but probably the dissertation Oakeshott wrote while working as a schoolteacher at King Edward VII Grammar School in Lytham St. Anne's, Lancashire, between September 1924 and July 1925, in support of his successful application for a Fellowship of Gonville and Caius College.

ii Oakeshott's intended reference was to Virgil, *Georgics*, II. 490: *Felix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas.* I am grateful to Dr. Robert Grant for pointing out the misquotation.

Four

The Philosophy of History

It is the fortune sometimes of the curious searcher among dusty and for the most part forgotten volumes to happen upon a volume whose title unites two of the most respected – though not equally respected – and most ancient objects of human interest, I mean philosophy and history. And, unless he pass it by without more ado, it may happen also that the note of strangeness sounded in this combination will lead him to turn the pages for a while, if not in genuine curiosity at least with suspicion. How long such a volume would serve to entertain him is a matter to be decided by his tastes or his engagements, but as like as not it would be but a short while only before he came to Dr Johnson's conclusion that 'all the philosophy of history is conjecture', and buried again the offending book in its fittingly obscure recess. And yet, before all recollection of the incident had faded from his memory, it might occur to him that his action in consigning again this strangely titled volume to its dusty sleep had been somewhat vulgarly hasty, that perhaps there might be more in this idea of a philosophy of history than he had at first supposed, and a resolve might even awaken in him to free his mind from prejudice and solicit more gently the pages for an answer to the perhaps already insistent question, What is a philosophy of history? At all events, may I, as an introduction to the few remarks I have to offer, ask you to suppose such a circumstance possible, ask you, indeed, to impersonate (thought it be difficult) our curious friend, go again to the library and take down the dusty tome. And when we have contrived some kind of answer to our question, it will be time enough to ask ourselves further whether what we have found is sense or nonsense.

The first book in whose pages I suggest we prosecute our search is a work some fifteen years old and entitled *Der*

Untergang des Abendlands. It is true that there is no sub-title to explain that it is a philosophy of history, but I have suggested it because its main ideas are the same as appear as in other works which actually claim that title and are more systematically and unambiguously set out than is usually the case. The author, Oswald Spengler, a more or less harmless university professor, has come to the conclusion that the history of the world consists of a succession of quite separate civilizations (*Kultur*), each of which has a period of youth (*Jugend*), growth (*Aufstieg*), bloom (*Blütezeit*) and decay (*Verfall*).[1] We have been accustomed to divide the history of western Europe into three periods – Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern – but this, he says, is wrong: we ought, instead, to see in Greece and Rome a single civilization which came to an end (in the 'political' sense) about the year 300 A.D.; and since about 500 A.D. the history of Europe to the present time is the history of a new and single civilization. But Spengler's discoveries do not end here; his conquests are not confined to sea and land, they extend also to the airy realms of 'philosophy', and he shows considerable faculty for living in what to the ordinary reader is an atmosphere of some rarification. For he thinks that by studying the life-history of those civilizations which have run their course, a general law of their birth, growth and decay may be established, or, as he calls it, a morphology of history. All civilizations follow in the main the same course; and as history tells us the fortunes of those of the past, the morphology of history tells us not only the path upon which our own feet are set to go, but also the path which must be followed by all civilizations to the end of time. There is no doubt that he has made a momentous discovery, and out of consideration for our not unnatural curiosity has provided, in an appendix, a chart upon which we may see ourselves as we were, are and shall be – up to about 2200 A.D.

But let us inspect more narrowly the methods by which these discoveries have been made. In the first place, how does he know that all civilizations follow in the main the same course? 'Because', he answers, 'since civilizations are natural phenomena, we expect them to travel this common road of youth, growth and decay for the same reason as we expect it of a plant or an animal.' Without variation civilizations have passed through these phases, that much history tells us: and that the future can contrive no new thing is the gospel of the morphology of history. All that keeps us from accepting this as an obvious truth is our radically perverted method of studying history. 'The means', he says, 'by which we come to understand dead things is mathematical law: the means for comprehending living things is comparison or analogy.'[2] We know, he goes on, that it is a custom with historians worth the name to make use of comparison – Napoleon carries us back to Alexander, Florence calls up Athens, Charles V's abdication recalls that of Diocletian, and so on – but they regarded it as a literary device, a kind of indulgence, rather than as the very breath of truth. What is required is systematic comparison; a 'technique of analogy' must be developed.

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[1] op. cit., i. 36.

And so he sets to work, drawing out for us (who follow with breathless minds) the points of analogy between the civilization of Egypt, the Greco-Roman civilization and that of Western Europe. Others before him have held that, by a minute inspection of the direction which the present civilization has taken, its direction in the future might be roughly foretold, but it is something of larger significance which Spengler offers. For example, the Egyptian and Greco-Roman civilizations, shortly before their final downfall, passed through a period of imperialism and great material prosperity (*Zivilisation*). In Greece the first dawn of this is the career of Alexander and its final manifestation is recognized in the almost cosmopolitan Roman Empire. Our civilization is now passing through this necessary phase of its existence. Alexander corresponds with Napoleon; they are both Romantics,[3] filled with some dream-idea of an Empire in the shadowy and seductive East but out of touch with the hard facts of the political situation of their day. The Stoic ideal of a world-community and the beginning of Rome's conquests correspond with the socialism and imperialism of the nineteenth century. And we are now entering upon the age of Caesar: the romantic age of Napoleon is passing away and Caesar's counterpart in this act of the drama of our civilization is Cecil Rhodes. The end is not yet, 'but we know our destiny' and cannot escape it. It might have been supposed that the fact of these discoveries – the fact that the cat is now out of the bag – would qualify in some respect our situation if not our destiny, that our knowledge would in some way give us power, but here at least modesty tempers prophecy and encourages us with no such hope.

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[2] ibid., i. 4.

[3] ibid., i. 53.

There are two respects in which we may criticize such a philosophy of history. We may suggest either that this particular system is a bad philosophy of history, or that all systems of this kind are impossible; we may criticize it, that is, from the point of view of its particular characteristics or its generic nature. And since (as you see) the latter includes the former and is the more fundamental criticism, it is obviously the one more worth while to attempt.

Such a philosophy of history as this is an attempt to discover general laws which govern the whole course of history, laws concerning the successive forms assumed by civilizations, of birth, growth and decay. These laws are conceived of as the unchanging truths of which the events recorded in history are instances. An apple falling from a tree is an instance of the law of gravity, and similarly the epoch of imperialism and material prosperity through which Western Europe is now passing is an instance of the law that all civilizations, shortly before their end, pass through a period of striving for world-dominion. These are laws of the same nature; this philosophy of history is a science in the same sense physics is a science. The facts, the events have been settled by the ordinary historian, the philosopher proceeds to determine the abstract, universal laws which govern their occurrence.

In this view of things there seem to me to be three entirely false assumptions. First, there is no single fact of history the nature and meaning of which is or can be finally settled. And in consequence the material to build our general laws is wanting. This can appear enigmatic or false to no historian, for he at least is aware of the immense difficulties which must be overcome before an historical question can be settled. But I refer here not to practical difficulties, but to a theoretical impossibility. History rests upon an inference from our own experience. When we are presented, as it were from the outside, with an historical 'fact', the question we ask is, Did it happen this way? (For to know *that* it happened without knowing in detail what 'it' is and how it happened, we should agree were barren knowledge.) And the final answer is possible only in terms of a coherent whole of history. From our theoretical standpoint then, no fact in history can be known in its full significance, exactly as it happened, unless all facts are known with a corresponding degree of fullness, and this is an obvious impossibility. The future influences the past; for it must not be forgotten that what we call 'the past' has no fixed and absolute existence but is simply our view of the past, a view seen in the light of a varying and growing experience. History requires distance; it is in the weak hands of ignorance rather than in the sensitive hands of knowledge that events cease to be malleable. To make such generalizations as Spengler's is to make bricks without clay – no mean accomplishment. Secondly, these laws are not in point of fact abstract and universal (like those of physics) because they are concerned with transitory, essentially non-recurrent events. Laws that might be deduced about the growth and decay of Gothic architecture are concerned not with something which is general and permanent, but with something which is both individual and past. And thirdly, this philosophy of history ignores the most fundamental characteristic of facts as viewed historically – their individuality. For history, events are not instances of a law, they are unique facts, happening at a particular time and in a particular place; and it is their uniqueness, the fact that *these* events never happened before and can never happen again, which is significant. That 'the French revolution produced Napoleon', is a unique historical fact. That 'anarchy is followed by despotism', is a statement in general terms of the significance which this fact may contain. That 'anarchy must invariably be followed by despotism', is a general law which no knowledge of history could ever warrant us to construct.

What then are we left with? I can see no alternative to the conclusion that our first excursion into the philosophy of history has been somewhat unprofitable. All these systems are so many enchanted castles, they appear to be something yet they are nothing but appearances which vanish from sight as we approach. We have found something which is, at least, perilously near to being nonsense.

But as we replace the book upon its shelf, prompted by the sight of another volume bearing the same title, logic may perhaps overcome disappointment or disgust. For it is possible that some more ingenious mind has avoided the somewhat elementary mistakes of the philosophy of history we have just examined and has produced a system which, though it may suffer from others, at least does not suffer from these faults. After all, in point of logic, our argument has only disposed of one kind of philosophy of history, and because there are bad apples it does not mean that there cannot be good. And so, perhaps a little reluctantly we may venture to open this other volume: dustier than the former, it is some eighty years older, and its title page reads *The Philosophy of History, in a course of lectures delivered in Vienna by Frederick von Schlegel* in 1828. Nor have we to read far in its pages before we discover that our conjecture was not without foundation, – a philosophy of history of a kind other than that which we have already examined is at least possible, for here it is.

Schlegel was a pious, learned, and in his later years Roman Catholic, Viennese professor; the first oriental scholar of his day and a man who has won a place in the literature of his country. The object of the philosophy of history, he says 'is to point out historically in reference to the whole human race the progress of the restoration in man of the lost image of God.' What he attempts is to see the history of mankind as a single whole and to exhibit its course as the gradual carrying out of some plan or purpose. Or rather, since, obviously, history is a sequence of events in time the conclusion of which is wanting, his object is to divine such a purpose from the observation of that part of the sequence which has already come within the range of our experience. 'By a lucid arrangement of the different periods of history', we are to be given 'a clear insight into the general plan of the whole'. I will not tire you with a rehearsal of the course of world history to which this book introduces us. Suffice it, that all civilizations known to the author are displayed with a wealth of learning and grace of illustration which holds our interest even when his theology tries our patience.

Here there is a philosophy of history which does not rest upon the assumption that the facts of history are known and settled, which does not attempt to construct general laws, and does not deny the uniqueness of historical events. It tries, on the contrary, to discover in history a single plan; a plan in which each event has an individual place and fulfils an individual purpose; a plan which gives to these events order and rationality. It is clear that such a philosophy of history may be worked out with varying degrees of thoroughness, nor need we suppose, when we use the word 'plan', that it implies anything more than a kind of 'plot' which is gradually being made. But here, at least, we have something we can understand, something we have met before. And it would not be in the nature of a digression were we to recall a few other examples, better known for the most part than our original choice.

The phrase 'philosophy of history' is reputed to owe its existence to Voltaire, but the *thing* – in the sense of seeing history as a single coherent whole – is, of course, much older. The book of Daniel in the Old Testament affords an excellent example; and, indeed, no nation has been more conscious of a plan in its history than the Jews. Christianity was not fifty years old before it was beginning to produce its own view or philosophy of history, and the existence of the Empire of Rome becomes in Origen's eyes a divine *praeparatio evangelica*. St Augustine's *City of God*, written in the fifth century, is the first thoroughly worked out 'Christian' philosophy of history. The history of the world is divided into six periods, corresponding to the days of the creation. Every event from Adam to the fifth century A.D. is part of a single plan; Egypt, Persia, Greece and Rome are seen as preparing the way for Christianity, and the sixth age, then already passing away, would witness the completion of the plan, the end of the world. The Middle Ages, also, were accustomed to graft their histories on to a plan, and many even of the monkish chroniclers, starting at the beginning with Adam, point out the universal significance of the events they record. The first centuries of the modern period have given us not a few writings of this kind, and of them we may, perhaps, notice the great Bossuet's *Discourse on Universal History*, which, beginning at the Creation, unfolds history as a whole whose unifying principle is the growth of Christianity.

You will have noticed that although all these views of history are 'philosophies' in the sense in which Schlegel uses the word, yet their plan is a little arbitrary and is both discovered from and applied to what is, after all, the history of an insignificant fraction of the human race during a very brief period of its existence. *We* know that there has been an ice age and are conscious of the possibility of another, but from this knowledge and this consciousness those earlier writers were alike excluded. In the eighteenth century, however, there took place a great revolution in historical thinking which may be said to have been inaugurated when Voltaire asked, What about China? Of course, he knew as little of China as everyone else, but for his purpose to know *that* China existed was all the knowledge he required. For his question meant, – if you wish to discover the plan which runs through human history you must not leave out of account the fortunes of one half of the human race. China boomed; and no writer was considered of consequence save he had published his history of China, Persia, India or of some other part of the world of whose history and civilization he was equally ignorant. When the first enthusiasm for the unknown had passed away, the scholars of Europe began in earnest to explore the literature and culture of the East and Schlegel devoted a number of his lectures to China and India; while Hegel, perhaps in an effort to make up for past injustices, spent more than half his course of lectures in the philosophy of history in dealing with the Chinese civilization.

In this volume of Schlegel's, then, we seem to have stumbled upon something which has been a permanent interest for human beings ever since they began to be interested in themselves. To see history as a whole, to discover its plan and purpose, and to note how each individual event is a necessary part of that whole – this is what these philosophies have attempted. But is it sense or nonsense? 'Surely', you will say 'surely, if you will only clear your mind of metaphysical nonsense you will understand that this seeing the plot in history is nothing to do with philosophy – it is plain history. It is what, in their varying degrees, all historians have attempted. If this is your philosophy of history, then all you have done is to steal a perfectly respectable vehicle of human thought, paint it a new (and somewhat vulgar) colour, rather clumsily change the number plate and pass it off as some celestial car which none save a metaphysician can operate.' And I think it must be admitted that you are right; it is nonsense, and what is more, misleading nonsense, to call this the philosophy of history. It is simply history; and history needs no apology and no justification. The voice with which it speaks is a human voice, and indeed it seems wholly inseparable from human nature. Everyone, or at least everyone we need consider, proposes to himself some object in life 'more important than mere respiration and obscure animal existence', and this object is the motive of history. History is to us an impulse, stronger than prudence, which, like Ulysses in Dante's 'Inferno', carries us out through the pillars of Hercules with the desire

> To explore the world, and search the ways of life,
> Man's evil and his virtue.[4]

And, like Ulysses in that poem, he says to us: 'Brothers, who through unnumbered perils have reached the Western limit, our eyes are wakeful for but a little space, let us win for them a sight of the unpeopled world South of the Sun. You were not made to live like brutes, but for the pursuit of virtue and of knowledge'.

'But what do you mean by saying that this seeing the plot, the wholeness in events is just history? Perhaps we should learn something more of history if you were to cease quoting poetry and answer us that'.

Aristotle in a famous passage says that poetry is more philosophical than history because it deals with a rational whole and not with a mere string of particular acts and events.[5] But this notion that history is no more than chronicling, the mere recording of events 'as they happen', is one we have outgrown, is one, indeed, the Greek historians themselves never held. We have seen already how history is of such a nature that it is always 'going out of date', that the historian is soon superseded, not only and not chiefly because new discoveries are being made in the past, but because time neither stands still nor is its passage through our minds without effect or gratuity; the past changes as we move away from it. Indeed, history is in some respects the most ephemeral of writing (though in others the most enduring) because what happens now and what will happen in the future actually influences the 'facts' of the past. Now, it is clear that this in itself implies that written history must have a plot. Consider the process of thought required for the intelligent reading of a novel. There is, perhaps, an incident on the second page which is passed over as trivial, contingent, as in no way essential; but when the hundredth page is reached and memory ranges back on what has gone before, this event, which seemed trivial enough 'when it happened' (so to say), has acquired a new significance, that is, it has assumed its place in the plan. And the reason why we at first failed to grasp its significance is that we had not read far enough to grasp the plan. In a well-written novel, when the reader is intelligent enough to make himself at home in its action, each detail is perceived as significant and its significance is to be discovered only by relating it to the whole. And is it not just this which happens in history? History and the plot of history are the same thing, to know one is to know the other.

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[4] Dante, 'Inferno', XXVI.

[5] Aristotle, *Poetics*, IX.

But at this point, it seems to me, historical writers have sometimes made a mistake. Every historian, in point of fact, does and must find some sort of plot in the events he narrates, but some find the wrong kind of plot. For, as we ordinarily use the word, it may contain either of two quite different meanings. In the first place, there is the notion that the 'plot' of a story is the outline skeleton of important facts, the abstract story without any details. And this notion has found its way into history. For example, there is a manner of writing history, in fashion some years ago, whereby the significant events were taken to be those whose significance was economic, and it was called the economic interpretation of history. This view of things implies that the 'plot' is a kind of skeleton of crucial facts round which all the mere details may be grouped. This, you will see, is Bossuet's kind of plot, which omits such details as the history of China and Peru. And Hegel, in the same way, excludes the inhabitants of the frigid and torrid zones of the earth's surface from the essential plot of history because 'cold and heat are too powerful to allow spirit to build a world for itself' – the evolution of spirit being for him the meaning of history.

But in history every event is significant, and there is no real distinction between greater or less importance: the crucial events are merely those whose crucial character we happen to be able to see. And this brings us to the second meaning of the word 'plot'. From this the whole idea of a skeleton is excluded. Each event has its own place in the whole, a place which cannot be occupied by any other. Goethe said that '*Natur hat weder Kern noch Schaale*', and the same is true of history. There is no skeleton to a jigsaw puzzle; the 'plot' is the whole seen as made up of every detail, and each detail seen as contributing to a whole. This is the kind of plot which exists in history, the kind of plot which it is the historian's task to discover. But even the simile of the jigsaw puzzle breaks down, because events have not the absolute shape of the parts of the puzzle, they change their shape in the process of being related to one another, and it is because no historical event can ever achieve its final shape that history will continually be rewritten so long as men retain an interest in themselves. The historian's aim is to see as interconnected the details with which he is dealing. His business lies equally with the discovery of details and the discovery of their interconnexion, for these discoveries are in reality a single discovery. And to see the interconnexion of details is to see them as making up a whole. This is true on whatever scale he is working, whether he be the historian of the French Revolution, the Roman Empire or the whole world of human life. It is the discovery of this whole or 'plot' which is history.

Our conclusions must by this time have made themselves clear. The philosophy of history in the sense of the discovery of general laws of which historical events are instances, is an illusion; in the sense of the discovery of a plot in history it is ambiguous. If the plot be a mere skeleton of so-called essential facts, it is a chimera; and if it be all the facts seen as an interconnected whole, it differs in no respect from history itself.

In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that philosophers of history are commonly objects of derision among historians; and yet, when we have dismissed the three commonest appearances of the thing, is it certain that we have altogether abolished the thing itself? Is it not possible that, should we clear our minds of some of these more obvious errors, we might discover that the philosophy of history has a real meaning, or, at all events, a meaning not to be so summarily disposed of? In any case, you will admit that should such a discovery appear possible, it is our business to question it more closely.

It is a natural human prejudice to suppose that a manner of looking at things other than that to which we are accustomed must necessarily be the result of 'trying for once in a way to stand on one's head', and it is commonly supposed that philosophy is simply a matter of looking at things up side down. This may in the end prove true, but were we to make the more modest supposition that philosophy is something, and therefore something different from other things, we should, I think, find ourselves in a more suitable position to answer dispassionately the question, what does a philosopher see when he looks at history?

The world of the historian is a world of half-true, half-understood facts and happenings out of which he must make up some kind of rational whole.[6] In ordinary language his object is fact. The historian, as such, does not think about history, he is not self-conscious, his object is always something other than his own historical thinking, for, were this not so, he would be simultaneously engaged with two totally different objects of interest. The philosopher, on the other hand, has a different object: and, in so far as he comes into contact with the historian, his object may be said to be history itself. History for him is one among a number of attitudes which the mind is capable of adopting towards the objective world; and the philosophy of history, we may suppose, consists in reflexion about the way in which the historian approaches his object, in some sort of consideration of the relation of the historian to the fact. If this be so we have gained at least one important point: we have found (have we not?) a study which, while it has something to do with history, is not itself history and should not be confused with history. This is where the other kinds of philosophy of history went wrong. Instead of making history itself the object of study, it tried to study the same object as history – the happenings of our world – and so, where it did not lapse into nonsense, became finally indistinguishable from history itself.

'The philosophy of history is thinking about history': what can be made of this? And surely, most of what we have been doing this evening is, if it is anything, thinking about history. So far, however, our thinking has been somewhat desultory, wanting in system and coherence, but were we to set in order some of the ideas which have already occurred to us, we might perhaps find ourselves in the way towards a truer philosophy of history.

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[6] 'There are hardly any certain facts in history; nevertheless facts have always some significance. The genius of the historian consists in making a true whole from incidents which are only half-true.' Renan, 'Préface', *Vie de Jésus*.

To the philosopher, history is *a* kind of thinking, and its particular nature may in part be discovered by comparing it with other kinds of thinking. What, for example, is the difference between science and history as kinds of thinking? Science has no interest in the individual event as such, for each event is merely an instance of a general law. In other words, science is an abstract kind of thinking which deals with such things as averages and not with individual things. Also, science is a kind of thinking which understands only what is physically measurable. Should a scientist wish to discover the effect of a certain drug on a certain kind of animal, he would repeat his experiment on hundreds of different specimens of that kind of animal and his final result would be an average constructed from the observed effects of all the experiments. But with history all is different. Averages have no place in the historian's calculations; he is dealing all the while with individual, unique facts – for the most part human facts – each of which has a particular place and time of its own, and all of which are buried in the past. From these no laws are deducible, for to deduce a general law would be to change the past from an individual occurrence into an instance of a rule.

And should history and philosophy be compared as kinds of thinking, differences would appear there also. The objects of the historian's thought are these facts which go to make up history. He must collect the evidence as to their occurrence, accept the testimony of those witnesses in whom he has confidence, and decide which those witnesses are by comparing them with others and by bringing their testimony into line with what for him is conceivable. Never in the whole process is the historian's thought turned back upon itself. Just as the artist is too absorbed in writing poetry or painting pictures to reflect upon the kind of thinking these activities require, so the preoccupation of the historian in his attempt to apprehend facts prohibits him from reflecting upon his process of thought. Philosophy, on the other hand, consists wholly in facing the question how we know what we know; and this question is the same as the question how we know that we know. Thought in philosophy is self-conscious, it is its own object. To be an historian and to think about history is not the same thing, to be a philosopher and to think about philosophy is the same thing. In fact, philosophy may be defined as that kind of thought which thinks about itself.

Here, then, we have made a beginning with our philosophy of history. History has turned out to be *a* kind of thinking, different alike from science and philosophy. But, since history is a kind of *thinking*, it must have the characteristics which are common to all activities which may properly be called thinking. The most elementary form of thinking is, I suppose, perception; in fact, it is so elementary that we often deny that it is thinking at all. When I say, 'I perceive a cucumber', I am apt to think of this as an 'immediate' perception, but this is an illusion. What has really happened is that I have brought to bear my past experience upon a certain object which is before me, or, in other words, what appeared to be a matter of sensation turns out to be a matter of thinking. If I see a long green object on a green-grocer's barrow, I say, 'There is a cucumber', for that is what my past experience tells me: if I happen to know that particular greengrocer my past experience may tell me, 'There is a bad cucumber': but if I see a somewhat similar object in a chemist's shop, my experience tells me, 'There is a soap cucumber', and so on. Thinking, then, is the application of experience or knowledge to objects of different kinds: and in the case of history these objects are distinguished by being in the past. *We* can go up to the soap cucumber and test it with our thumb-nail and say, 'yes, I thought so', but the historian can never do this, he can never absolutely *prove* anything. How, then, can he be said to know anything at all, for we usually admit that he does know something? The historian works on the supposition that we live in a world whose happenings are not purely arbitrary, he assumes that a 'fact' which appears without a cause and without a consequence is no real fact at all. Would the emendation of texts be other than one of the major futilities of learning unless the scholar supposed that what was before him was intended to make sense and not nonsense? Or, how could an historian come before us as possessing the mere elements of intelligence if he were not prepared to reject some perhaps fully attested so-called historical fact because it was 'incredible', that is, because it denied the rationality of the world? The fact is that history rests in the last resort upon our own present experience or knowledge, and that this is the sole means and justification we have for regarding any supposed event as really having happened.

The world of the historian is in this way limited by his knowledge; and because the knowledge of no two historians is exactly the same, each has an individual and unique approach to any given problem. An historian sees in the past as much as his experience allows him, and the more he finds out the larger is his experience and so the greater becomes his power of judgment. The conclusions he reaches he calls 'facts' and on the basis of these he sets out to discover more: his sources turn into his conclusions and his conclusions turn back into his sources. History is, therefore, inexhaustible; the history of no period, no people, no event can be written once and for all; no historical problem is finally solved.

May I draw from this one of the many conclusions which offer themselves, one which is perhaps of interest to historians? Since the truth of history depends upon our power of judgment, and our power of judgment depends in turn upon the extent and orderliness of our knowledge, we shall expect to find that what is called 'contemporary history' – history written under the shadow of the events themselves – is the least adequate of all kinds of history. 'Whoseover in writing a modern Historie', says Sir Walter Raleigh in his *History of the World* 'shall follow truth[7] too near the heels, it may happily strike out his teeth.' 'A remarkable feature of our written history is the absence from it of some of the most influential personages', says Disraeli. And is not the reason for this that we stand as yet too close to the events to see their true proportion? Events, likewise, must mature before they become good history. The further we get from the event the truer is the history we may make of it; and it is only because we can never get to the end that we can never write an absolutely true history of anything. Of course we make our mistakes. It seems the fashion at the present time to reverse the judgments of past writers apparently from no other motive than that of mere contradiction. Marcus Aurelius, they tell us, was a bad man, Pitt an incompetent scoundrel, George IV the only man of artistic taste who has sat on the English throne, Tolstoy's ruling motive was vanity, Henry VIII's fault an ill-judged indulgence of the whims of his wives, Patrick Brontë was the only talented member of his family, and

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[7] i.e., 'the event'.

Judas Iscariot was a far-sighted financial genius. But there can be little doubt that the future will reverse many of our judgments and question many more. Thucydides withdrew to Thrace and Xenophon to his little farm at Scillus; but he who is to improve upon our judgments must be removed from our present world not by space, not by the mere matter of time, but by the greater extent of knowledge which time brings, and must sit down in the retreat of the future, like one of the inhabitants of Elis who judged the Olympic games without taking part in them.

But it is already more than bed-time and we must put these playthings of the mind into their box, taking, as we do so, one last look at them, for they are some of the results which a philosophy of history may be expected to furnish.

History is not mere recording; it is a kind of *thinking*. It is a particular kind of thinking, unlike both science and philosophy, but resting upon the common presupposition of all kinds of finite knowledge. By its nature it can never come to an end; but the greater our experience of this present world, the greater will be our opportunity of seeing past events in their true proportion and significance. These are not the conclusions of historical thinking, but of thinking about historical thinking, and so of what may reasonably be called a philosophy of history. But that it will be secure from the contempt of the historian is perhaps too much to expect. 'All this is metaphysics, you cry: that is enough: there needs nothing more to give a strong presumption of falsity.' (Hume)

EDITORIAL NOTES

[i] LSE 1/1/5. Autograph. The MS is undated but is filed with a letter dated 24 April 1927 from W.W. Buckland, discussing its contents.

Five

What Do We Look for in an Historian?

Historians, as a class, suffer singularly little interference nowadays from the interest of their fellow human beings. So long as they produce what we want we do not feel it our duty to enquire what they are like at home. Plenty of us are interested, in one way or another, in history, but very few of us can rake up much interest in historians. There are various reasons, some good and some bad, for this attitude. The first and worst reason, is that we haven't, as a rule, the time to follow out two interests at once, and if we are interested in history we must leave the historians to look after themselves; and so we take the history and let the historians go. Another, and better, reason, is that we have a suspicion that, after all, the history is a good deal more interesting than the historian, and that, as a matter of fact, there 'ain't no such person' as an historian behind a good deal of what we know of as history, and so it would be waste of time to look for him. That is all perfectly true, a great deal of what is called history is no more written by real historians than a great deal of what is sometimes called poetry is written by real poets. But, then, if we knew more about the animal that produces these histories, we might be able to judge a little more clearly whether or not they are real histories. For nothing is more certain that that only a real historian can write a real history. A third reason may lie in a very proper dislike of going behind the scenes. We like to see a good play, we enjoy acting, but it would spoil it all if we went behind the scenes and saw the wires that lifted Peter Pan out of the window or the hind legs of the elephant brushing his trousers as he goes out for his tea. All this would break the spell and serve no useful purpose that we can think of. But this reason rests on a misunderstanding. I should be the last person to suggest that you should play the newspaper reporter and affect an interest in the colour of the ink Macaulay used or his size in hats. It is not knowledge of this sort about historians that I am urging you to acquire; it is nothing but what can be discovered from the written history itself. I don't want you to go behind the scenes; what I suggest is, that it may be interesting to use our written histories not only for finding out when Oliver Cromwell died and what was the character of the Duke of Marlborough, but also for finding out the character and attitude of the historian himself. But, whatever our pretended reasons are for being more interested in history than in historians, shall we, for the moment, forget them, and as Browning says, look from the gift to the giver?

Now, the general lack of interest in the historian has produced a very noxious habit which somehow or other we must overcome if we are to find out anything at all about him. And the fact that this preference for history and neglect of the historian produces this habit seems to me to be very good evidence that it is an artificial preference which should not be encouraged. The habit I refer to is that of 'using' books. I picked what looked like a rather interesting book from a friend's shelves the other day and asked him if he had read it and what it was like. 'Oh No', was the reply, 'I haven't *read* it, only "used" it.' And that is the case, I am afraid, with most of us; we 'use' our history books, never read them; and consequently we never discover what this or that book looks like as a whole, we never allow the character of the historian to creep out and invade our minds, we never know anything about our history books except a certain number of isolated facts and detached pieces of information which we find by means of the index. And what are our reasons for this procedure. Either we say that we haven't time to do more than 'use' our books; 'I suppose', an American Professor is said to have remarked; 'I suppose someone has actually read Gibbon and Macaulay, but for my part I have never had time.' Or we say, with much greater truth, that most books are not worth more than 'use', they are so badly written that it would be impossible to read them from beginning to end. But we have agreed to put aside, for the moment, our somewhat lame excuses. Most of us like history, any normal person – that is, anyone who does not prefer his dog to his fellow human beings – has some interest in history, and I think if we could get to know a little more about historians we should, or some of us would, be even more interested in history. And, after all, historians do have something to do with history – some of them even make it – and we can't know very much about either without knowing something about both.

Now, directly we start talking about historians and their relation to history we are up against this problem of how history *should* be written. Some writers tell us that this or that historian really did solve the problem, he wrote history as it should be written and all we have to do, if we wish to be good historians, is to copy him. But, don't you believe it. Nobody has solved the problem of how history should be written, and for the same reason that nobody has solved the problem of how poetry should be written, or how chess should be played or how houses should be built – because there *is* no such problem. We have been told, so often as to be nearly persuaded, that history must be scientific, or it must be imaginative, or it must be impartial, or it must be impersonal. But why all this '*must*'? Why should there be only *one* kind of history? And we are particularly puzzled because, as far as we know, there *are* a great many different kinds of history, and we find it very difficult to say one kind is really so much better than any other that it is the only kind we can allow the name to.

For some people, however, this is no difficulty at all. They are the learned folk who profess to be able to see a definite progress in the writing of history, and to them one kind of history differs from another kind because it came before it in this gradual development. There are 'periods' in the writing of history just as there are periods in the writing of poetry or novels. History written in the eighteenth century is different from history written in the nineteenth, and both differ from what is being written in the twentieth. In the Middle Ages, says one writer, history was a sermon; in the nineteenth century, it was a science. To some it is Machiavelli's *History of Florence* which marks a turning point in this development; to others it is Voltaire's *History of Charles XII of Sweden*. But this idea of periods, of a development in time as the thing which distinguishes different kinds of history, happens to be what I want to avoid; first, because I don't think it gives us the enlightenment we are seeking, and secondly, because I don't know enough about it to make what I might say interesting. I do not, then, want to introduce you to this or that historian and say, 'This is Mr So-and-so; he wrote before Machiavelli and history for him was a sermon', or, 'This is Mr Someoneelse, he wrote before 1857, so you will know what to think of *his* history.' We are not to visualize the whole body of historians as floating down that stream which bears all its sons away unless they are careful. I want to introduce them to you as if they were contemporary characters, as if they were sitting together in a room – all writing their histories simultaneously. They come, it is true, from different ages; but, what is more important, they come from different ranks, they have different temperaments and aims, they suffer from different prejudices and are moved by different enthusiasms; in short, the striking difference between them is not that they belong to different times, but that they possess different characters. Here they are, then; they all hold their pens in their hands and are in the process of writing their particular histories. And can we wonder, any longer, that all histories are different from one another, and that the problem of how history *should* be written is just an illusion? Should we expect anything else? What I want you to notice about them is that they are individual men, not so very unlike ourselves, and, if you spoke to them in turn, you would soon discover that there were very few kinds of human character unrepresented.

Let us try an experiment. If you were to start a discussion among a group of ordinary, intelligent men on, say, How to solve the London Traffic problem – because, as you perhaps know, there are so many buses in London now that some of them have hardly room to put their feet down – What kinds of opinions would you get? Well, no doubt there would be a sceptic in the group, someone who was very doubtful indeed whether the problem could be solved at all; in fact, was almost certain that it couldn't be. There would certainly be a man who would declare that he had actually been to London himself and as far as he could see there was no problem at all. He would be a thoroughly prejudiced person and his judgment would be very decided indeed, in fact, anyone who disagreed would have an uncomfortable feeling that he was a fool. Then, there would be the man who could settle the whole business out of hand, to him it would be a problem that any schoolboy could solve. He would be a voluble gentleman, and at times perhaps even virulent, and no matter what subject was under discussion, he would have a very definite opinion. Perhaps there would be someone in the group who came to the problem with a fresh, clear, unprejudiced mind, and had a very daring, original solution to offer. It might not work, but at least he would persuade us that it was worth trying. It is possible, also, that someone would be there who really knew all the facts, but because he knew them all he wouldn't know how to deal with them. He would know all the different interests which must be conciliated, but he would not know which were important and which might be neglected. The man with a theory might speak next. He is a familiar figure; he has one theory which will apply to everything: all problems are solved in the light of his particular view of human nature, or the age of the earth, or the date of the Pyramids. The man of imagination would at least entertain us; he would be a bit vague perhaps, but there would be a certain sparkle about his opinions and, at any rate, he wouldn't miss the wood for the trees. The enthusiast would bust in at this point. His solution might be original or it might be common place – it would probably be one which someone else had already propounded – but he would argue for it as if his life depended upon its adoption. There would be no silencing him till he had said all he had to say at least twice over. Not so his neighbour, he would not speak until his opinion was requested and then – well, it would all be very difficult. He would hardly like to give an opinion. Everyone in the group would be aware that he knew more about the subject than anyone else, but that would not make him less tentative. He would say that he must give more thought to the matter; it was something that required prolonged consideration. There would, of course, be quite a number in the group who had no opinion at all. They would say that they thought Mr So-and-so's scheme sounded to them the best; they would say that they had listened to the discussion with great interest, but for themselves they really didn't know what to think; – largely, of course, because they had never made the effort required to think about anything. We should soon be tired of hearing these particular gentlemen talk – especially after all the wit and wisdom of the other members of the group – but we should not make a dash for the door until one of them got up and began to recount all the schemes that had ever been tried or thought of, where they had been tried and who had thought of them. There would be no stopping him, we should have to escape as best we could. Some people would call him 'the historian of the movement', but he would be no such thing; he would be a member of that singularly frivolous body of men who are known as antiquarians, – dead, and with their latest breath giving one brief moment more of life to things otherwise as dead as themselves. These, then, are some of the opinions which might be expressed in a group of normal human beings; and do we trouble our heads as to whether they conform to some single, absolute standard of how opinions *should* be expressed?

Unfortunately there is perhaps no single question upon which all historians of any note have given an opinion, but, failing that, from the evidence we have, it is possible to come to some conclusion as to how a group of the more famous historians would approach such a question as, Why did the Roman Empire fall? And I think we should find that those opinions would correspond very fairly to the kind of opinions we have already listened to about London's Traffic Problem, simply because in both cases we are dealing with the characters of men. Let us see how it would work out.

In our group of historians there is certainly one sceptic; did not Anthony Froude conclude his biographical sketch of St Neot, a contemporary of King Alfred, with the words, 'This is all, and perhaps rather more than all, that is known of his life'? And there are plenty of others who would express some doubt as to whether this historical problem could ever be solved. And what about the gentleman who declares, a little ambiguously, that there is no problem at all, and that any schoolboy could settle it? Why that is just what Macaulay was always saying. He has a decided judgment on every question, he corresponds exactly to my virile, sometimes virulent, and opinionated friend. And both Voltaire and Gibbon have moods of this sort. In Maitland we shall find the man with the clear, unprejudiced view, daring and original, not because any new discovery of fact has been made, but because he has seen the old facts in a new light. Maitland would be one of the greatest of this kind of character, but there would be many other lesser lights. There has been a great movement lately for the reversal of conventional historical judgments and it has been carried out partly by historians of this kind and partly by journalists. Marcus Aurelius, they tell us, was a bad man, Pitt an incompetent scoundrel, George IV the only man of artistic taste who has sat upon the English throne, Tolstoy's ruling motive was vanity, Henry VIII's fault an ill-judged indulgence of the whims of his wives. Patrick Brontë was the only talented member of his family and Judas Iscariot was a far-sighted financial genius. It is hardly necessary to give an instance of an historian who knows all the facts but cannot deal with them; or of one who knows very few of the facts, who has a very clear picture of a wood but a very blurred one of the trees in it – for they are more common than any other kind. Of the historian with a theory, 'who keeps one end in view and makes all things serve', there are numerous instances. Save us from the historian with a theory! we are apt to exclaim, but some of them, we must admit, write very well. It is only when their theory is very fantastic indeed that we need get impatient with them. Buckle's *History of the Civilization of England* is the work of a man with a theory, and so are all the other so-called philosophies of history. Bancroft wrote a history of the United States of America on the theory that the voice of the people is the voice of God, and I met a man the other day who approached every historical question with the presumption that self-interest is the sole motive from which men act and that what is in the interests of one individual is necessarily against the interests of everyone else. These are the kind of people whose presence make us feel that we have an important engagement elsewhere. But when a sane man like Voltaire does it, we are captivated in exactly the same way as a very able barrister's speech captivates us. The enthusiast is among our group of historians also. Ranke was an enthusiast and his enthusiasm was so great that he started to write a history of the world when he was over seventy years old. George Grote was the first Englishman to write a really enthusiastic history of Greece. And both Prescott and Parkman had this kind of character. There are plenty of historians, also, who are as diffident as Macaulay was decided. Stubbs would never really make up his mind on things, and nor would Creighton; and Lord Acton almost raised his natural diffidence into a philosophy: he it was who, after years of almost incredible research came to the conclusion that it was possible for the Pope to err. It is the fashion now among historians to be diffident and a very good fashion it is, though it sometimes makes us sigh for the conclusiveness of a Macaulay or a Voltaire. In all these different kinds of historian it is not difficult for us to find some points of interest, but what we have no patience with is the historian of no character at all. There are some like that, many of them write text books; but to say an historian has no character is, I think, to say that he isn't really an historian at all.

Well, I suggest that the conclusion we may draw from this experiment of putting our historians together in a room and listening to them talk, is that different kinds of historian naturally produce different kinds of history and our business is to understand these differences and not to show our ignorance by asking questions like, How *should* history be written? The muse of history has no fixed caste of countenance, any more than has the muse of poetry, she can be sad and gay, tragic and comic, daring or pedestrian, enthusiastic or sceptical. What she must never be is dull like Hallam, blind or dishonest or pedantic like Ludwig.

But, before we leave this roomful of historians to themselves again, I should like to take you to stand behind a couple of them, in turn, and see if we can discover a little more in detail what kind of character it is which they bring to the writing of history, what are the particular prejudices from which they suffer and what are the particular enthusiasms which move them. There is not time to look over the shoulders of more than two of them, and I confess that it is only after some indecision that I have decided on this particular pair – Gibbon and Macaulay. And what I want to look for particularly is just this quality which I have called their character. And I think one of the things we shall discover by looking closer is that, though each may have some dominant feature, most characters are mixed, and that the group of historians we pictured to ourselves just now was really rather a group of abstract qualities than of living men.

Everyone has heard of Gibbon and his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, but on the whole few people have more than a purely external acquaintance with the book. And the peculiar thing is, that a good deal of the praise and reverence Gibbon gets comes from the first and larger class of human beings. Most people who have not read any of him are very ready to inflict a kind of penance on themselves by talking of what they have missed, but that does not mean that those who do summon up sufficient courage actually to open the book are always disappointed. Gibbon may not be quite all those who have not read him claim, but it is safe to say that he has disappointed only those of his readers whose praise he would neither have courted nor valued. The *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* comprises, roughly, the history of Europe from the age of Trajan to the Fall of Constantinople, that is from about the year 100 AD to 1500 AD. To Gibbon, as we can see from his writing, it was more important for a man to follow the bent of his own genius, to follow his ideas wherever they might lead, than to define the character and scope of his work from the beginning. For a great many years he simply read anything and everything that came his way. After a time, he thought that he might make use of this reading by writing a history of Switzerland, but he rejected that in favour of this great book, which he set out to write at the age of thirty-six. So, then, the *Decline and Fall* may be described as arising not out of reading and investigation directed expressly to its production, but out of Gibbon's own taste and character. And in this he was rather peculiar.

Gibbon's main aim, from first to last, was simply to describe the past. The ultimate meaning of it all did not interest him. He is the great example of an historian without a theory: Gibbon was no philosopher. History to him was a drama and not a problem; and just as surely as any dramatist, he selected his facts and told his story in such a way as to make it both living and dramatic. But, if there is no theory behind it all, there was in Gibbon's mind a *plan* which informs the whole work, a kind of frame-work into which everything is fitted. It was Gibbon's prepossession that the golden age existed in Europe in the period immediately before Marcus Aurelius, and continually, as he tells his story, he reverts to this golden age to measure against it, as against some absolute standard, the degeneracy of the succeeding periods. His theme, you see, was decay, and, like the artist he was, he refused to introduce a discordant note. And this strict adherence to a single guiding plan or idea – the idea of Decay – enabled him to marshal his facts so as to set his narrative marching steadily in one direction, with the inevitability of fate, like a Greek drama. This, I think, is the most important thing we can learn about the *Decline and Fall*; and it seems to me to be something which makes it much more interesting than it would otherwise be. But there are two other minor characteristics we might notice: First, Gibbon's immense erudition. The *Decline and Fall*, it has been said, is a book without fringes: Gibbon never takes a subject half way and then, for want of knowledge, lets it drop. He knows all there is to know of what ever he is writing about, whether it be the manufacture of silk, the details of a banquet, the building of a cathedral or the intricacies of a theological dispute on the Roman law. He writes with authority on everything he touches. And secondly, his power of imagination. In spite of all his learning, Gibbon never depended upon his memory; in everything that he wrote we can see his mind moving with the course of events. For him, as for any artist, to know an event was not only to understand how it happened, but also to imagine it happening: and what is true of events is true, also, of characters.

I want to read you two passages to illustrate these points. The first is the description of the Emperor Julian's march from the Rhine to Constantinople.

> [T]he praises of Julian were repeated with transport in every part of the empire, except in the palace of Constantius…the apparent tranquility of Gaul, and the imminent danger of Easter provinces, offered a specious pretence for the design which was artfully concerted by the Imperial ministers…to disarm the Caesar….but [the] mercenary troops…loved and admired Julian; they…forcibly entered the palace, seized, with respectful violence…Julian…and with repeated shouts saluted him as their Emperor…The ambassadors of Julian…when at length they were admitted to the presence of Constantius…found that he had already conceived, from the despatches of his own officers, the most unfavourable opinion of the conduct of Julian, and of the Gallic army…The hopes of Julian depended much less on the number of his troops than on the celerity of his motions…He selected three thousand brave and active volunteers, resolved, like their leader, to cast behind them every hope of a retreat: at the head of this faithful band, he fearlessly plunged into the recesses of the Marcian, or Black Forest…his diligence, and vigor, surmounted every obstacle; he forced his way over mountains and morasses, occupied the

> bridges or swam the rivers, pursued his direct course…and at length emerged, between Ratisbon and Vienna, at the place where he designed to embark his troops on the Danube. [ii]

Note the breathlessness of the description which corresponds with the speed of the march. There is imagination there, as well as learning.

The second passage I want to read is Gibbon's character of Belisarius, the general of Justinian. And what I want you to notice is the way in which Gibbon builds up the picture.

> Belisarius…the Africanus of new Rome was born…among the Thracian peasants…[and] served…among the private guards of Justinian; and when his patron became emperor, the domestic was promoted to military command…in the space of three months he…achieved the conquest of Africa…He was immediately declared consul for the ensuing year, and the day of his inauguration resembled the pomp of a second triumph…Whenever he appeared in the streets and public places of Constantinople, Belisarius attracted and satisfied the eyes of the people…But when he entered the palace, the courtiers were silent, and the emperor, after a cold and thankless embrace, dismissed him to mingle with the train of slaves…his fortunes were sequestered, and…he was guarded as a prisoner in his own place. At length his innocence was acknowledged; his freedom and honors were restored; and death, which might be hastened by resentment and grief, removed him from the world about eight months after his deliverance.[iii]

There is a whole drama in this character. It is not unlike King Lear: – Justinian is the king who does not know when he is well served and suspects those who are serving him best, and Belisarius is the Earl of Kent, the faithful but distrusted servant. Like a dramatist, Gibbon tends to raise his characters above their own individuality and make them types. Just as, since decay was his theme, he allowed no discordant note to enter the narrative, so in this character of Belisarius every fact is given its greatest dramatic value – lowly birth, rise, success, real greatness of character, Justinian's jealousy and the gradual decline of Belisarius's fortunes until at the end of his life he has reached the same level again as that from which he started.

There is no time to illustrate the many other characteristics of Gibbon's style. He had most of the prejudices of his age and many peculiar to himself. He had a wonderful turn for irony; like Milton, his style was that of a lion 'which had no skill in dandling the kid'; and like all men of imagination he was apt to exaggerate, as when he says that 'a thousand swords were plunged *at once* into the bosom of the unfortunate Probus', or that 'a string of camels laden with corn and provisions, covered *almost without an interval* the long road from Memphis to Medina', but that, I think, is hardly an imperfection. His characters are sometimes caricatures, but that often makes them the more interesting. Of an Emperor he says, 'In every act that he attempted, his lively genius enabled him to succeed; and as his genius was destitute of judgment, he attempted every act except the important ones of war and government. He was master of several but useless Sciences, a ready orator, an eloquent poet, a skilful gardener, an excellent cook, and a most contemptible prince.' Gibbon, then, we may regard as not an historian who belongs to a certain period, but as an example of the way in which a certain type of character and mind approaches history.

Macaulay presents us with a quite different character and mind, but not, I think, on that account less interesting. The things which everyone knows about Macaulay are that he wrote a history of England, some historical essays and had a memory so capacious and flexible that he was never put to the trouble of thinking. And, for the most part, these things are true. Macaulay had no, or very little, imagination, but a marvellous memory; and that is one of the main differences between him and Gibbon. Now, if you happen to have a good memory you will know that it is the most difficult thing in the world to control. A sight or a sound or a face seen in the street will call to mind a whole string of circumstances and associations, most of which will probably be altogether irrelevant. You all know the kind of man who breaks in on a conversation with, 'Yes, that reminds me…' and then brings out a whole string of personal memories mostly interesting only to himself and all irrelevant to the discussion. Macaulay as an historian is a little apt to be like that. Here is a passage to illustrate what I mean. It is from the Essay on Warren Hastings.

> On the third day Burke rose…The energy and pathos of the great orator extorted expressions of unwonted admiration from the stern and hostile Chancellor, and, for a moment, seemed to pierce even the resolute heart of the defendant. The ladies in the galleries, unaccustomed to such displays of eloquence, excited by the solemnity of the occasion, and perhaps not unwilling to display their taste and sensibility, were in a state of uncontrollable emotion. Handkerchiefs were pulled out; smelling bottles were handed round; hysterical sobs and screams were heard; and Mrs. Sheridan was carried out in a fit. At length the orator concluded. Raising his voice till the old arches of Irish oak resounded, 'Therefore,' said he, 'hath it with all confidence been ordered by the Commons of Great Britain, that I impeach Warren Hastings of high crimes and misdemenanours.'[iv]

It is the description of the wandering eye of a particularly well-informed newspaper reporter: an echo of the casual remarks of the spectator's 'What a nice voice the clerk of the Court has!' 'Yes, my dear, he's the cousin of William Cowper the poet.' 'I do wish this man would sit down, he has been talking for so long' 'Look at the roof; isn't it magnificent?' 'Yes; you know its all made of *Irish* oak.' Macaulay had not imagination enough to give the scene as Warren Hastings or Burke saw it, and so he just lets his memory run away with him and brings out all these odd pieces of knowledge, which any real artist, like Gibbon, would have rejected from his narrative even if he happened to know them.

Gibbon has a plan which runs through the whole of his great work, but Macaulay's memory forces so many details and associations to the surface, that any plan there might have been is soon lost. Macaulay is not a great dramatist; he gives us, rather, a series of gorgeous tableaux, or pageants.

Another characteristic of Macaulay was that he had an opinion, and a very definite opinion, on every subject. There is nothing tentative, enquiring or diffident about his writing, and that, I think, is one of his most engaging and most annoying qualities. Rymer is 'the worst critic that ever lived.' Archbishop Laud is 'a poor creature who never did, said or wrote anything indicating more than the ordinary capacity of an old woman.' 'Boswell is the first of biographers. He has no second.' Lucretius wrote 'the finest poem in the Latin language.' And just as there is never any qualification in his judgments, so nothing in his histories happens quietly, and no character is ordinary. Macaulay's immense reading supplied him with a great store of vivid pictures. He collected them from forgotten journals, pamphlets, diaries, and poems and so easily did they come into his mind as he wrote that he never had need to exercise either his powers of thought or imagination. 'He reads twenty books,' said Thackeray, 'to write one sentence.' Titus Oats: – 'His short neck, his legs uneven, the vulgar said, as those of a badger, his forehead low as that of a baboon, his purple cheeks, and his monstrous length of chin, had been familiar to all who frequented the courts of law.' And Dr Johnson 'in the brown coat with the metal buttons and the shirt which ought to be at wash, blinking, puffing, rolling his head, drumming with his fingers, tearing his meat like a tiger and swallowing his tea in oceans.' You notice the way in which Macaulay's memory and the associations which are at the back of his mind build up the picture. 'Short legs' – 'like a badger'; 'low forehead' – 'like a baboon'; 'tearing his meat' – 'like a tiger', and so on. It is the entertaining art of caricature, and Macaulay is always at it, often quite unconsciously.

Macaulay's inherent over-certainty of temper, which was flattered by the easy victories of his youth, was bolstered up by a particular trick by which he was accustomed to anticipate and meet any criticism. He frightens and dazzles his readers by the display of his stores of learning and by the assertion of what it is the duty of others to know. 'Every schoolboy knows', says Macaulay; and the things every schoolboy should know make a far-fetched and opulent collection. There are very few facts contained in books which a man need be ashamed of not knowing, but the deadly phrase did its work like the threat of a blackmailer. Macaulay's schoolboy, of course, never existed; he is an overfed phantasm, an engine cunningly contrived to produce shame and diffidence in the reader.

Macaulay, then, for us, is not a nineteenth century historian, one who wrote after Gibbon and before Stubbs; but is an historian who possesses certain characteristics of mind and temperament which govern his way of thinking of and writing history. We may not like them, but that does not mean that no one ought to like them, and the idea that we can set up some absolute standard of how history *should* be written by which to judge him or anyone else seems to me not a little presumptuous. Most of an historian's sins, particularly if he sins boldly and well, make his writing more interesting, and make him a better historian than he would otherwise be. Save us, save us only from the historian with no sins.

What, then, do we look for in an historian? I think we ought to get away from this idea that we ought to look for the same thing in every historian, rather, we ought to look only for what each particular historian has to give. It is easy enough to be disappointed that Macaulay is not a second Gibbon, to pass judgments to the effect that this historian is better or worse than this other, it is easy enough to *exclude*, in fact it is so easy that it is not worth doing. What is worth doing is to understand, and if you want to understand somebody you must go to him expecting nothing which he may not have to give. When we have really understood an historian it may be time, then, to start excluding him, to say that he is not the sort we like, but I think the only kind of historian I should like to exclude is he who has no character, no opinions, behind whose writing is no guiding temperament. It is not enough, then, to say that so-and-so is an historian; he doesn't begin to be interesting until we have started to discover what kind of an historian he is.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[i] LSE 1/1/47. Autograph. Written on the reverse of cover sheets for Cambridge University entrance scholarship examination papers, one of which has been dated by a candidate 'Dec 1927'. In the top left hand corner of the first MS sheet Oakeshott wrote: 'The theory that we should read history making *allowances* for the passions & point of view of the historian.'

[ii] The original MS reads: 'Julian co-ruler with Constantius: he ruled Gaul, Constantius the East. J. successful, but C. not so against the Persians. His army declare J. Emperor: ambassadors to C. but as C. does not agree J. decides to march on Constantinople. p. 322.' The edition of E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 6 vols., 1776-88, that Oakeshott used has not been identified, but the content of his summary clearly refers to Chapter 22 of the *Decline and Fall*. Extracts reflecting the passages indicated have been supplied.

[iii] The original MS reads: 'Short description of who Belisarius was. pp. 652, 677, 679, 712.' Extracts have been supplied from Chapters 41 and 43 of the *Decline and Fall*.

[iv] The original MS reads: '(p. 636-7)'. The edition of T.B. Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays*, 1843, that Oakeshott used has not been identified, but the references to the clerk of Court and the roof of Parliament being made of Irish oak suggests he intended to refer to the conclusion of Burke's speech impeaching Hastings.

Six

The Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe

It seems probable that human or semi-human beings have been living on this earth for about a million years. For more than nine hundred thousand of this million years we have but the barest traces of human life. Successive ice ages came and went. But in this third warm period, the period in which we are now living, which began from fifty to one hundred thousand years ago, began this development of what we call civilization. The men of the Early Stone Age, who lived at the beginning of this period, have left traces of their way of life all over Europe; they used stone tools, they lived in caves, they knew the use of fire and lived by hunting. And this, in general, remained the condition of human life until about ten thousand years ago. About ten thousand years ago there is evidence of a rapid improvement of the climate of Europe and a more rapid development of civilization. Men came out of their caves and built huts; they established institutions and developed family and tribal customs. They practiced agriculture; used domestic animals, made furniture and pottery and clothes. They had religious ceremonies and communal festivals. This stage of civilization lasted for different lengths of time in different parts of the world. It exists to-day in the Australian bush. But after a period of about seven thousand years (that is, about three thousand years ago) there began to be established in the Nile Valley and in Mesopotamia a far more complicated civilization. Greece and Rome inherited these Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations, and Rome spread a civilization to a large part of Western Europe. But outside the circle of Greco-Roman and

Eastern civilization, the life of man in Europe about two thousand years ago was little different from what it had been ten thousand years ago. Tribal warfare, murder, pillage, the enslavement of conquered by conquerors – this was the life of Europe less than two thousand years ago. Agriculture was practised and some primitive crafts. But perhaps the sole intellectual achievement, apart from practical invention, was a belief in a future life.

Looking around to try to discern what, apart from a far greater control over the natural world, and a more advanced social organisation, distinguished the civilization of the Nile Valley, Mesopotamia and above all Greece from this condition, there is one thing which stands out clearly: it is the existence of *communal self-consciousness*, distinguished from individual self-consciousness, which is a growth of a much later date. Perhaps not even the most primitive tribe is without some traces of this self-consciousness; and in any case it is something which has grown very slowly. Egypt and Mesopotamia show only the smallest signs of it. And, roughly speaking, out of the million years of man's occupation of the earth, 997,000 of them were spent in relative or absolute communal unconsciousness. But, for a variety of reasons, it appeared in a highly developed form in Greece in the fifth century B.C. And this communal self-consciousness is the root from which may flower what we call social and political thought – thinking about the social and political conditions and institutions of the community in which we live.

How long a community must live together and what circumstances must prevail before it begins to think of itself as an entity, standing for something different from other communities, it is impossible to say. Certainly a community must have long established customs, laws and institutions before this can happen, and probably it must be able to contrast its way of living, its civilization with that of some other neighbouring community; and it must have achieved a high degree of intellectual development. These conditions were, at any rate, present in Greece, when Thucydides produced for the Athenian people what is, so far as we know, one of the first coherent statements of the self-consciousness of Athens.[1] There may have been others in Greece before Thucydides who caught up in their minds and expressed in the language of abstract thought the scale of values, the social and political ideas, which were current in Athens; and it is possible that others before him, in earlier civilizations, did for their communities what Thucydides did for his (certainly the ancient Hebrews, for example, very early developed a very high degree of social and political self-consciousness), but Thucydides remains for us, in Western Europe, the first great figure in the history of social and political doctrine. And the reason why I choose Thucydides, rather than, say Socrates or Plato, lies in the nature of what I mean by a social and political doctrine.

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[1] Oakeshott's marginal note: '450 B.C.'

A social or political doctrine is, obviously, the product of intellectual activity of some kind applied to the social and political institutions under which a man may live. It is possible to live in even a very highly organized society and yet remain unconscious of that society; many highly organized societies never succeeded in achieving an intellectual grasp of the principles which belonged to their social organization. The organization itself was never thought of as having been made; for each successive generation it was an inheritance of custom and institutions which was received without criticism. Changes no doubt took place, but they were slow and unobtrusive and the product of circumstance rather than thought, and there was no necessity to attempt anything like an intellectual comprehension of the life of the society as a whole. The relationships, the rights and the duties which make up the life of the society were merely accepted. And the society as a whole never achieved anything like a consciousness of itself.

But, in different circumstances, an attempt may be made to think about and to rationalise the social and political life of a community. And this rationalization, this setting down in language of abstract ideas, of the relationships and institutions of a society is the beginning of a social and political doctrine.

A social and political doctrine is, then, something which presupposes a highly organized social and political life. It may be an exposition of that life in terms of ideas; it may be a criticism of that life in terms of ideas; or it may be an attempt to construct, out of what is presented, an intellectual plan for a different set of relationships, rights and duties. But in every case, its essential character is the conscious application of the intellectual achievement of a society, its experience and its knowledge, to the social and political organization of that society. It is the result of the intelligence of a society turning back upon the structure of the society and making the character of that society known to itself. Such an activity cannot take place unless there already exists a high degree of social self-consciousness; but one of its most important effects is to increase and deepen that self-consciousness.[2]

Now thinking, intellectual analysis of social and political institutions, of this kind may take place at various levels. And what I mean by a social and political doctrine is an analysis that takes place on a certain level of thought but goes no further and no deeper. It is an analysis and a rationalization of the life of a society which converts the arrangements of the society into instances of general principles, which expounds those general principles, but which stops short of considering the ultimate questions which such thought inevitably suggests. That is why I take Thucydides, and not e.g. Socrates, as the first great figure in the history of political doctrines in Western Europe. For Thucydides stated for the Athenians what he believed to be the values and the fundamental principles of Athenian civilization, while Socrates went further and discussed the nature of values and the nature of principles. Thucydides was not a philosopher; he neither attempted nor produced a philosophical analysis of the nature of society and the state. He was content to expound for the Athenians some of the intellectual presuppositions of their institutions. In Thucydides, then, we have, among much else, a social and political doctrine, a rationalization up to a certain point of the life of Athens. But like other men who have formulated social and political doctrines, what he said raised questions which he was content to leave unexplored; his analysis falls short of being a final analysis.

A social and political doctrine, then, is the result of the impact of the intelligence of a society upon the life and institutions of that society. But it is limited. It seems to stand at a kind of half-way point between an intellectual unconsciousness of the character of the life of a society, and a full philosophical analysis of that life. As a rule it is something which follows upon a high degree of institutional and legal organization in a society, rather than precedes and guides that organization. That is, its essential character is to be a rationalization of the life of an existing society. Italian Fascism, for example, is sometimes criticised because it produced no doctrine until the régime was ten years old. This is not quite true; but even if it were, it would be nothing remarkable. Representative Democracy is something older than the abstract ideas which comprise its doctrine. And, appearances notwithstanding, both Communism and National Socialism are doctrines which present themselves as rationalizations of events that have taken place, circumstances already existing. Doctrine, as a rule, may be expected to follow upon practice and to arise only when life and practice reach a certain level of self-consciousness. Communism alone of our doctrines in the modern world is a doctrine which was elaborated originally without reference to any particular society – except that it may be said to have reference in Marx's mind to the social and political structure of the whole of Western Europe.

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[2] Oakeshott inserted the following note at the end of this paragraph: 'Cp. Grammar of language. (i) Subsequent – go on using nouns and verbs without even knowing them as nouns and verbs (ii) More coherent than the actual language. Fact and desire mixed. (iii) Effect upon the language itself.'

What, then, is the importance to a society of a social and political doctrine? Is the formulation of such a doctrine something which has no great effect upon the life of the society, something that can be disregarded? Or is it something which conditions and reconditions the life of the society so powerfully that it belongs inseparably to the history of the society?

I think, from the evidence we have at our command, that a social and political doctrine is something of fundamental importance in a society which has one. It is something which a society can live without; it is something that for hundreds of thousands of years men have lived without; but it is something which, where it exists, makes this society fundamentally different from what it would be without it.

A social and political doctrine affects the life of a society in two related ways –

1. First, it creates an incomparably higher degree of self-consciousness in the society. To formulate a doctrine is, I think, an unavoidable step in the development of a society's self-consciousness. It is true that what it produces is a kind of intellectual self-consciousness which may add little to the

kind of emotional self-consciousness on which the solidarity of a society rests and which we call patriotism, but it adds something even to that – it gives an intellectual content and coherence that otherwise is lacking. A doctrine undoubtedly makes a society more of a society – rights, duties, laws and institutions which were hitherto apprehended merely in separation are seen to belong to a coherent whole. Now, a doctrine does this by drawing out and expounding the *principles* of a society. Its whole tendency, that is, is to make principles out of facts and institutions. Slavery may be a fact in a society, but when Aristotle formulated his rationalization of slavery, it could no longer be regarded as an incidental social arrangement; it became a principle. To hate the Jews is one thing; to make a principle about that dislike is another and much more important thing. The tendency of a doctrine is, then, to *fix* a civilization; to make firmer and more rigid as well as more coherent, the life of a society. This, of course, has its dangers; the possession of a doctrine makes it less easy for a society to change. A bad doctrine must always be more deadly than a bad action. But, again, this is a danger inseparable from self-consciousness. And the intellectual coherence which a doctrine may give to a society is a benefit which cannot be enjoyed without this danger.

A social and political doctrine may, then, in the first place, be considered as an intellectual construction explanatory of the life of a society. Its virtues and defects will be the virtues and defects of the society. But apart from this it may be considered from the point of view of the adequacy with which it represents the life of the society. A bad apology for a good life is nothing new. And a doctrine may reflect a defective intellectual life as well as, or independently of, a defective social and political life.

2. But a social and political doctrine may affect the life of a society in another way. It has a strong and important emotive value.

There are those who believe that men are never moved to action by ideas – who believe either that the springs of action are to be found in instinct or that they lie in economic circumstances – but I think their account of human activity leaves something to be desired. Men who, with the greatest reluctance would defend an institution, will be prepared to die for an idea. Social and political ideas, which are the components of social and political doctrines, have certainly impelled men to action. Of course, no man incapable of apprehending a political idea is likely to be moved by one. But in the modern world the ability to comprehend a political idea is common enough, or at least it has been common enough since the eighteenth century, and only those who are in general impervious to ideas are apt to dismiss the doctrines of our world as 'mere ideologies' without meaning or significance.

A social and political doctrine is, then, important on account of the heightened self-consciousness that it gives to a community, and because it is capable of being a spring of human action.

Now, the social and political doctrines we have to consider this term are those displayed in Western Europe to-day. And I propose to say something in turn about each of the five doctrines which may be said to rationalize and explain the political communities of contemporary Western Europe; the five doctrines, which we will call Representative Democracy, Catholicism, Communism, Fascism, and National Socialism. But before doing that, I want for the rest of this morning to consider the roots in the immediately past history of Europe from which these doctrines sprang.

A social and political doctrine may be expected to draw life from two separate but related sources. (i) In the first place, it will naturally reflect social and political circumstances. Modifications in the social and political structure of Western Europe and changes in the current popular political ideas are the elements from which we should expect contemporary political doctrines to be constructed. (ii) But, in the second place, a social and political doctrine may be expected to reflect the intellectual fashion of the world in which it exists. In considering the sources of contemporary political thought, then, we must consider not only the history of events and institutions, but also the general intellectual history of the time.

We are often told that the great turning-point in the modern world was the War of 1914. And no doubt the Europe of 1914 is something dead that can never come alive again. But the revolution in ideas which we can see clearly today, that is so often attributed to the war, is really something that was taking place long before 1914 to which the war added little or nothing. The roots of even the newest of the social and political doctrines of the contemporary world go back well into the nineteenth century. Neither Fascism nor National Socialism as doctrines belong exclusively to the post-war world; if they did they would be something much less important than they are.

In looking for a starting-point for the social, political and intellectual development which has produced (with one exception) the doctrines of contemporary Europe one might be tempted to select 1789. 1789, it is true, symbolises an access in the social and political self-consciousness of Europe which has gone far to producing our doctrines; but that, too, is not a starting point. Behind it lies the American Independence. And behind that lies a more fundamental change, though one less easy to identify, that we call the Renaissance. All starting points in history are no doubt merely relative, and the changes which created our contemporary world were slow in operation; but somewhere in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries these changes were beginning to be accomplished. The causes of them are, of course, various and obscure, and it may seem almost frivolous to try to state the character of those changes in a sentence. But, so far as they affect and condition the social and political structure and doctrine of the contemporary world, the important movements of these centuries were (i) the break-down of religious authority and the beginning of the establishment of a fundamentally *secularist outlook*; I will try to explain later the set of ideas which I have in mind when I use the word *secularism;* (ii) the creation or development of the national communities of Western Europe; (iii) the beginning of the break-down of 'rationalism' and the substitution for it of a philosophy of relativism of one sort or another. There were, of course, other important changes; and I have said nothing of the economic changes which may lie behind these. But taking the social and political doctrines of the contemporary world and considering the ancestry of their most fundamental conceptions, we are taken at once back into the seventeenth century. This is true of all the doctrines; but one, the doctrine of Catholicism, of course carries us back to the Middle Ages, presenting us with a set of ideas which the subsequent history of Europe has modified very little. But leaving Catholicism on one side for a moment, the rest of our doctrines reflect unmistakably these movements and tendencies which are already clear in the seventeenth century.

In the nineteenth century these tendencies became the dominant tendencies of Western Europe. Secularism was an almost universal presupposition of social and political thought – with what consequences we shall consider later. Centuries of living together, sharing a common language, creating a common literature etc. had made the national communities of Europe, which in the nineteenth century began to have a more acute consciousness of themselves than ever before. And the development of modern science accentuated that lack of faith in reason which even the weakest rationalists of the eighteenth century had felt and which had been expressed in the seventeenth century by Hobbes.

Now, the first thorough formulation of these tendencies, and the kind of society that they were producing, into a social and political doctrine was accomplished in the doctrine of Liberal Democracy. Apart from Catholicism, which of course represents a different tradition altogether, the Liberal Democratic doctrine is the oldest of our doctrines. The product of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it became fixed in its main principles about the middle of the last century.

It did not, of course, lack critics, and it cannot be said that it was universally accepted in Western Europe; but there can be no doubt that it was the dominant social and political doctrine in the nineteenth century and that its influence spread far outside Europe itself. We shall have later to consider the form in which this doctrine appears in our contemporary world. But for the moment what is important about it is, (i) that it is the first formulation of the social, political tendencies of the modern world; it is the first *modern* doctrine reflecting the tendencies of secularism, nationality and relativism; and (ii) it so far established itself in the world during the nineteenth century that it forms the inevitable background of all subsequent doctrines.

Why has this doctrine fallen from its dominant position? What change has taken place to make it appear less relevant than it once appeared? I believe that no fundamental change has taken place; certainly it was not the war of 1914 which changed the situation. What has happened is that the tendencies which the Liberal Democratic doctrine first rationalised and incorporated have become more pronounced, or have changed their immediate incidence. With the virtual collapse of religious authority, secularism, which at first was mainly negative in character, opposing authority with freedom, has become positive, and claims an authority of its own. With the increasing solidarity of national communities, the principle of *Nationality* which was essentially a movement to include and to create, has become the opposing principle of Nationalism which is something essentially static and exclusive – a desire to keep and to shut out. And the limited scepticism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has become the absolute relativism of Marx, the pragmatism of William James and the intuitionism of e.g. Bergson, scepticism has degenerated into a radical mysology. The secularism of Liberal Democracy has been found to be perverted; its nationalism too watery; and its Scepticism not sufficiently unqualified. This, at least, is what its modern critics are, in effect, saying. Communism, Fascism and National Socialism each, though in somewhat different ways, pursue this line of criticism. Each accepts the fundamental tendencies of the modern world and finds the Liberal Democratic doctrine an inadequate expression of those tendencies. While the Catholic doctrine develops a criticism of Liberal Democracy which will apply equally to the other doctrines, because it is based upon a rejection of these fundamental tendencies.

Something, though little, has been done by the guardians of the doctrine of Liberal Democracy to meet these criticisms by a reformulation of its principles. But what the contemporary world of social and political thought presents us with is, in the realm of fact, the succession of Nationalism to Nationality, bringing with it a vast access of communal self-consciousness. This is the soil in which the variety of doctrines of the modern world has grown up. And in the realm of ideas, an accentuation of all the fundamental tendencies of the modern world, so that a doctrine which seemed to express those tendencies a century ago now appears to be out of date, if not moribund. And just as the good may be a greater enemy of the better than what is positively bad, so the Liberal Democratic doctrine, born of the same tendencies as gave birth to Communism, Fascism and National Socialism, is regarded by them as their chief enemy. The secularism of Liberal Democracy is condemned as mere anarchy and materialism; its nationalism as mere self-seeking, contemptible because it does not express 'a sacred egoism'; and its scepticism the scepticism of a child who has merely achieved an intellectual distinction between will and reason without grasping the primacy of will over reason.

I propose, then, this term, under the heading of the Social and Political Doctrines of Contemporary Europe, to consider the doctrines which go by the names of Representative Democracy, Catholicism, Communism, Fascism and National Socialism. All of which doctrines can be represented as rationalizations of the life and institutions of one or more societies in contemporary Europe.

Now, I have collected together some statements of these doctrines in a book; and I shall use that book as a kind of text for these lectures. The character and limits of the book are obvious. It does not pretend to deal with the history of these doctrines, merely with their statement and content. It deals only with doctrines which represent the life and institutions of actual communities. And, wherever possible, it is confined to official or authoritative statements.

There is so much incongruous matter in the book that it has been strongly bound; otherwise it might disintegrate from spontaneous combustion. But, with the proviso that we are willing to consider, at least, doctrines that are abhorrent, or worse, to us, there are a variety of ways in which the book might be used. Each of these doctrines is a rationalization of a fact and an ideal, of a fact and a desire. None of the doctrines represents exactly how any community lives or what it believes; but each represents how a community would like to live or how a dominant part in the community would like it to live and how it lives to a certain extent. They may be considered, then, separately as diverse representations of our civilization. But further than that, the book may be used to institute a comparison between the different doctrines in respect of different aspects of the life of a community. The conception of authority, the place of property, the notion of government, the solution offered to the economic problem, the nature and place of the individual – on each of these topics these different doctrines have something different to say; and it is instructive to compare their different pronouncements. But, in the main, I shall confine myself to offering a commentary, partly historical and partly analytical on each of these doctrines in turn. In some cases trying to explain exactly why a certain passage has been chosen to represent a doctrine, and in others trying to elucidate the meaning of some of the more obscure passages. I am well aware that there are defects in the book, and as I go along I shall try to remedy these to some extent. Especially there are gaps which I want to fill in the section on National Socialism.

I shall begin next time to discuss the doctrine of Representative Democracy.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[1] LSE 1/1/10. Autograph.

Seven

On Peace with Germany

The minds of contemporary political thinkers in this country and in America have what appears to be an admirable character of dauntlessness: they are not afraid to consider plans that involve the transformation of the world. But this intrepidity has another and less admirable side: it is long-sighted and liable to a preoccupation with what is large and distant to the exclusion of what is close and immediate. The virtues of near sight go unrecognized; they are confused with the vice of political myopia. This is a dangerous condition of mind, even when it is not accompanied by an easy optimism. There is no guarantee that, if we settle the large problems, the closer and more immediate problems will settle themselves; and this habit of mind which encourages only long-range views may easily be our undoing. At all events, I think it is the intellectual vice against which we have to guard at the present time. And I want first to call attention to something that this wide and generous temper of our political thinking is liable to overlook.

It is our common expectation that the defeat of our enemies will be followed by an armistice, and that this armistice will be followed by a Peace. The armistice we think of as something temporary, a military convention, and a matter properly between ourselves – the United Nations – and our enemies; the Peace must involve the entire world. And there, perhaps, our expectation of events stops. That it should stop there reflects, I think, the inadequacy of our preparation of mind for the end of the war; for, between the armistice and the Peace there lies an unconsidered interim. The armistice is immediate; its conditions we know in general and do not require to know in detail. The Peace is distant and multifarious. But between them lies an intermediate state, the chief problem of which is the question, What shall we do with our enemies?' And it is not too early to consider the proposals on this matter that have been put before us.

2

Let us consider first the views of those who justify their political long-sight by asserting that the question, What shall we do with our defeated enemies? is inseparable from the larger question, What settlement of Europe – or of the world – shall we attempt after the war? For those who think this way there is only one question – the conditions of the Peace. Their long-sight overlooks everything that stands between. Now, it is obviously true that the question, What shall we do with our defeated enemies? is not the only question we shall have to answer after the war. No doubt some larger settlement of Europe will be attempted. But it is certainly false to suggest that our enemies present no separate problem. Indeed, if experience teaches us anything, it teaches us that in the matter of the 'larger settlement' our hopes should be modest, that it is a piece of folly to suppose the world can be remade or it would be better for being remade, but that in the matter of our enemies our intentions should be radical. If we are prepared to consider only a long-term policy embracing the whole world, there can be little doubt that we shall fail to solve either the world problem (if, indeed, there is such a thing and if it is capable of solution), or the smaller and immediate problem of our enemies. The first necessity is not to have ready at the end of the war a world plan, but to have ready a plan for dealing with our enemies. No doubt it will be the aim of those enemies to divert our attention from themselves and to concentrate it on the world at large, indeed a move in this direction has already been made and many have been duped; but we must refuse to be diverted. We shall be misadvised if we listen to those who desire to persuade us to surrender the opportunity of a wise settlement with our enemies in favour of the remote chance of a permanent world settlement. It is, then, a first principle that we must separate this question, What shall we do with our enemies? from all other questions.

Now, while the fight is on, we are accustomed to attribute to our enemies a homogeneity which in fact they do not possess; and that appearance of singleness is enhanced when we speak of them as 'the Fascist powers' or 'the Axis.' But in fact now, and both in fact and appearance when the time comes to make a settlement, we have three quite distinct enemies: Germany, Italy, and Japan. And it would be the greatest folly to assume that the question, What shall we do with our enemies? must or should be answered in exactly the same way in respect of each of them. In order, then, to give a rational answer to our question, it must be resolved into three questions. And in my view incomparably the most important of the three is the question, What shall we do with Germany?, and it is this question alone that I shall attempt to discuss. Perhaps the most difficult of the questions will turn out to be, What shall we do with Japan? But of Japan I know nothing, and will not venture to speak. And few will be found to suggest that the problem of Italy is either more difficult or more important than that of Germany.

The assumption that lies behind these views, the first principle that I suggest is involved in a rational answer to our question, must already be clear, but to avoid all doubt will state it explicitly: it is, that what we must have in the front of our minds is solely and only the particular danger to our civilization that each of our enemies presents. It is for that reason that they must be treated differently; it is for that reason that some are more important than others; it is for that reason that no answer will be satisfactory which is not rooted in as true a view as we can achieve of the actual character of the particular enemy we are considering.

And this leads me to a second assumption. It has been a common saying that we are defending our civilization against an enemy intent upon destroying it, but it is a saying that appears to be more upon the lips than in the mind. If we listen to our enemies they will, of course, tell us that our civilization has failed and that in destroying it they are the benefactors of mankind. But it is not only our recognized enemies who believe in the failure of our civilization; it is a belief that finds some favour also at home. One thing, however, is certain – no settlement with our enemies will ever be satisfactory unless it arises from a real confidence in our civilization. To come forward in a mood of apology is to have surrendered to our enemies, and no military victory will counteract that surrender. Nor is such a mood either candid or necessary; it is false and deceitful. It need be no part of our faith that everything in our civilization is good; Western Europe has not found an ideal way of living and, the evanescence of imperfection being no part of a rational faith, it is not to be expected that it ever will. But that its worst is not incomparably better than the best of what Germany has long desired to establish, nothing will persuade me. What we have here is not, and never will be, an ideal best, set over against a satanic worst; but something workable, capable of improvement and not disagreeable to the unchangeable conditions of human existence, set over against a way of living designed to corrupt, in both conquerors and conquered, whatever springs of profitable life there may be in the world. But, whatever be the truth of this contrast, it is (I believe) certain that without confidence in our civilization we shall, not only fail to make a Peace worth the name, but fail also to make a satisfactory settlement with our enemies. Above all we must guard against the sophistry, put about by the enemies of our civilization, that because we were unprepared for this war, because Hitler nearly won, therefore our civilization is proved decadent. We are still apt to listen without protest while the twenty years between the two German wars are described as barren, decadent, and graceless. [And yet, when we take a firm grip upon the facts, and refuse to be argued into a bad conscience, the worst that can be said against us in this period is that our diplomatic purpose was weak and our pursuit of good ends more negligent than it should have been.][ii] That world may have been a world in a political trance; but only those too young to know anything about it except by hearsay can be excused the view that these two decades were a period of which we should be merely ashamed. There were many diplomatic mistakes, there was, perhaps, corruption (a small amount) in high places, but folly of this kind is not the same thing as crime, and inept diplomacy is not the same thing as civil decadence. It is an altogether false standard of values that condemns a civilization because it lacks the shrewdness to recognise a barbarian when it sees one, or even because it lacks the crude solidarity necessary to conduct a war with savages.

Now, though it would appear scarcely worth while at this time of day to insult the intelligence of this nation by proposing arguments of this nature, the folly of listening to them is not so fully appreciated that they may be neglected. In a book called *Germany Tomorrow*, Otto Strasser speaks of Hitler's work of destruction as a 'necessary stage in the transition from a decaying order to an evolving new one.' He writes to persuade us that this war is a 'European civil war', and that Hitler is a 'testing hammer' – that whatever survives him has proved its worth. Somehow, it appears, we should be grateful to Germany for stopping the rot in European civilization, and this gratitude should be reflected in the eventual settlement. That this and similar attempts to organize sympathy for our enemies should find any recommendation outside Germany is remarkable; but it is only a particularly tendentious statement of that lack of confidence in our civilization which will certainly make a rational settlement with our enemies impossible. That there are villains everywhere, and that the prospect of loot and power should call them from their holes, is no new experience; but that one of them should offer this as evidence of the decay of our civilization and at the same time pose as the saviour of society and expect to be believed, shows a confidence in universal stupidity unsupported in the history of any people, even that of Germany.

3

I have argued, so far, that if we are to consider rationally the question, What shall we do with our enemies? we must first dispel the cloud of irrelevant considerations that now obscures our minds. And the first of these is the belief that what we have to consider is something to do with justice or mercy, with guilt or innocence or with punishment. The least that can be said of the present regime in Germany is that it has been guilty of conduct which, in individuals, would be held by any civilized community to merit the severest punishment. But it does not follow from this that the design of the settlement with our enemies must be in terms of guilt and punishment. And when we consider the difficulties and the inadequacy of a settlement in these terms, it becomes clear that to design it in these terms would be to purchase the consequences of folly. Those of our advisers, and they are many, who bid us think of the settlement in terms of guilt and punishment are at once faced with the problem of distinguishing between the guilty and the innocent among the individuals who constitute the nation of Germany; and it is unavoidable (unless all can be counted equally guilty) that a settlement on this discriminative principle must be a settlement with certain individuals proved guilty of specific criminal conduct (individuals who in any case cannot live long to disgrace our civilization) and not at all a settlement with Germany itself. There is, perhaps, no great difficulty, in extreme cases, of determining the guilt of certain individuals, and they may be numerous. But when these have been convicted and punished, we shall not have begun to solve the only problem worth solving – how to remove the danger that Germany is to our civilization. Even the village policeman knows that if a certain sort of conduct is to be prevented something more must be done than merely to punish those convicted of it. Let us, by all means, punish the guilty, and for this we must attempt the difficult task of distinguishing them from the innocent; but do not let us delude ourselves that this is an adequate substitute for a settlement with our enemies – a settlement which, because it must be in terms of the interests of our civilization, cannot be in terms of guilt or punishment. Indeed, so different are the principles which must be followed in making a rational settlement from those to be followed in punishing the guilty, that it is better to separate altogether the two things in our minds. Let us, then, hear no more of guilt and innocence, of punishment, or even of justice and mercy, from those who would advise us on this settlement.

There is another irrelevant consideration which we must dismiss from our minds. To say the least, the present regime in Germany has been guilty of destruction and cruelty unequalled in the history of the world. But no settlement can ever repair the damage it has done; it is beyond human power to reconstitute the lives lost or ruined. Take from Germany what you will, and it will not begin to replace what Germany has taken from mankind. This does not mean that reparation should not be demanded for what little can be repaired: it means that the settlement with our enemies must not be conceived in terms of reparation; it means that the design of our settlement must be to protect and to enhance what remains of our civilization, and not merely to extract a reparation for the damage it has suffered. Neither to punish nor to repair are means by which the object we have in making a settlement may be achieved; they are something additional and on one side, and they must not be permitted to interfere with the purpose we have in mind or to deflect us from achieving that purpose.

4

If the first care of our settlement with Germany must be the principle of protecting our civilization from renewed attack, and if this implies not only a love of our civilization but also a deep understanding of it and a faith in its value, it implies also, it would seem, an equally profound knowledge of the enemy against whom we are to protect ourselves. Know your enemy is a maxim to be followed not less in making a settlement than in conducting a war.

Who is this enemy? I believe it to be the character of the German people; I believe that what we have to protect ourselves against, because it is an enemy of our civilization, is the German character. Why I believe this, and what I believe the German character to be, I will explain in a moment. But first, because this is a view not generally accepted, I must consider some of the arguments of those who see the enemy elsewhere.

It is asserted by many that, setting aside all questions of guilt or innocence, the attack upon our civilization has been made, not by the German people but by a part or party of that people, the National Socialists; it is National Socialism that constitutes the danger to our civilization and our settlement must be made with that doctrine and its adherents. By others it is asserted that the danger goes deeper, that it lies in something called 'Prussian militarism', something older-established in Germany than National Socialism, but still something other and less than the German people. And by others, again, it is asserted that only the victims of a foolish theory can be so deluded as to suggest that the German people, as a whole, has a character. Now, I believe that all these views are false, and that a settlement with our enemies based upon any of them will be a profitless settlement. But these views are so widely held, and so much of the advice we are given is based upon one or other of them, that anyone who believes them to be false must be prepared to state his case.

That we are at war with National-Socialist Germany is obvious. This war, no doubt, is the outcome of Hitler's system: it is Hitler's Germany that we must defeat in battle. But it does not necessarily follow that, when Hitler's Germany is defeated, when National Socialism is destroyed as a political system, there will be an end of Germany as a potential danger to our civilization. To destroy National Socialism is not necessarily the same thing as to protect Western Europe against a recrudescence of barbarism with Germany as its breeding-ground. And perhaps we need not waste our time with the few who cannot understand this distinction; they are guilty of a simple logical error, the error involved in the argument that because a man is a thief, he cannot therefore be a murderer. The more dangerous view, because more plausible, is the view that, though the danger of Germany to our civilization is not *necessarily* limited to Hitler's Germany, it is so in fact; the view that if National Socialism were destroyed, Germany would in fact cease to be a menace. The many who take this view believe that National Socialism is a social and political phenomenon foreign to the real Germany; they believe that it is a disease which has perhaps spread through a large part of the body politic of Germany, but which has nevertheless left untouched the heart, and that the heart is, moreover, sound and free from any other disease. Indeed, one writer has gone so far as to suggest that the 'working classes' of Germany are anti-Nazi and that if these were released from the Nazi terror, and came to take the lead in Germany, we should hear no more of that people as a menace to our civilization. Let us consider the arguments by which this view is supported.

First, we are told that there now is, and has always been, a substantial opposition to National Socialism in Germany. Quite apart from those Germans who voluntarily quit their country because they could not bring themselves to participate in, or to condone by passive acquiescence, the conduct of Hitler's regime, there are many who have done nothing (save keep their mouths shut) to support Hitler. And further, there are some who have actively opposed his system and are now to be found in concentration camps. Hitler is not representative of Germany because, we are told, there are anything up to two million who have suffered from opposing the regime. We are told also that the very conduct of the regime proves that 'the masses of the German people' are innocent of willing cooperation with it. Listen to Aneurin Bevan, M.P.: 'If Hitler was convinced that the generality of Germans could be relied upon to co-operate enthusiastically in preparing and making war on the world, why did he consider that his first task was to gag, bully and intimidate the German people? Surely if they are what the hate-merchants make them out to be, the Brown House, the concentration camp, the suppression of all free institutions in Germany, the burning of books, the punishment for listening to foreign radio and the manipulation of the press – all these were utterly unnecessary. The fact is that Hitler could not trust the German people to follow him in his maniac intentions if he left them to the free exercise of their informed judgment. The fact is – and it is the basic fact from which our reasoning must proceed – the ordinary German was the first victim of Nazi aggression and when he lost his freedom ours was immediately threatened.' In short, National Socialist Germany is an unhappy interlude in the history of a nation otherwise harmless, it is the creation of a few maniac villains working upon unpromising material. Hand that material over to the good Germans, who are as many as the villains are few, and this menace to our civilization will have disappeared.

Now, the defects of this line of argument are at best that it would not prove the case that it is designed to support, and that it is based upon a childish ignorance of the nature and history of national socialism. First, consider the matter of this opposition in Germany to National Socialism. If to oppose any evil at once put a man on the side of the angels, then all the opponents of Hitler's regime might be numbered among the saints (along with the rest of us); but, of course, the hypothesis contains an elementary error. In fact, it does not follow (except for those whose minds are muddled) that opposition to National Socialism makes a German, for that reason, a reliable friend of our civilization. National Socialism is certainly not the only menace to our civilization that has come out of Germany, and it may not be the worst. Those who set about proving that the mass of the German nation is sound at heart because it is innocent of willing cooperation with the National Socialist regime not only prove too little, but they set out to prove too little; their minds are too muddled to know where to begin.

Again, those who hold the view we are discussing grossly overestimate the size of the relevant opposition in Germany; there is no evidence at all to support the figure of two million. But even if we accept this figure, we have to subtract from it the Jews, and all those who, like the Jews, might be expected to oppose the regime because the regime opposed them, before we can arrive at the number of those who could be relied upon to oppose it in all circumstances and because it is destructive of our civilization and for no other reason: for clearly it is these only who can be considered the relevant opposition. And when this final figure is put beside the total adult population of Germany, the opposition will be seen to have been, what it appeared to be to all unbiased observers, pitifully small. And it is among these few only that our allies in peace will be found, for none are our allies save the friends of our civilization.

Thirdly, those who rely most upon the internal German opposition to National Socialism have yet to understand that this opposition is essentially fluctuating in size and significance. When the regime is successful, the opposition is small, when the regime is in difficulties, the opposition is larger, when the regime is defeated, the opposition will be huge. But from the point of view of the threat of Germany to our civilization, what we have to consider is the opposition in Germany to National Socialism *if it were victorious* in this war. If National Socialist Germany succeeded in dominating and enslaving the whole European continent, if it achieved what it set out to do, how many 'good' Germans would there be? For practical purposes, none. Even Otto Strasser knows this, and being a German finds nothing remarkable in it. 'Not until the nimbus of victory has faded from Hitler's brow', he says, 'not until his "battle of the Marne" has convinced every German patriot that the alternative "Hitler or Germany" has been presented – not until then will the ice break that now encrusts the brains, the hearts, and the arms of Germans.' The opposition 'will take action as soon as they are convinced that Hitler has become a danger to the national existence of Germany'. National Socialism promised the destruction of our civilization and its replacement by an order in which the Germans should be masters and the rest slaves; many Germans fancied their chances of success, many were converted by actual success, some remained faint-hearted, but those only are to be counted reliable opponents of the regime who were never dazzled by the promise – and they are few. [Our answer to Aneurin Bevan and his friends is that they must think again if they are to produce an even plausible defence of their view. Our answer is that, since they are lovers of freedom, they do not understand a people that will make a slave of itself voluntarily, they do not understand a people that derives pleasure and satisfaction from suffering violence from its leaders – they do not understand the Germans, as Hitler understands them.][iii]

So much for their arguments; their understanding of National Socialism itself is no better. National Socialism is not the dementia of one man supervening upon the life of an otherwise sane and democratic people; it is not even a reaction against an ill-founded democracy. Enough is now known of the inner history of the Weimar Republic to make even the most credulous abandon this view. National Socialism is, as anyone who has studied it does not require to be told, a rehash of ideas and ambitions current in Germany for nearly a century, combined with a new method of realizing those ideas and ambitions in the world. Since nothing in the doctrine is new, what may be distinguished as Hitler's gift to his people is the method of realizing it. National Socialism inherited a habit of mind and of feeling and invented a method of satisfying those habits. In the end, those only may be counted good Germans who never contracted that habit of mind and feeling: the danger with us lies in mistaking for good Germans those who disapprove merely of the method of satisfaction. The settlement we have to make is not merely with the method by which National Socialism is distinguished, but with the habit of mind and feeling that National Socialism presupposes; for it is in this habit that the menace to our civilization lies.

5

Leaving National Socialism, we shall be met next with the second of our popular fallacies, the belief that the menace to our civilization lies neither in the German character, nor in National Socialism, but in 'Prussian militarism'. National Socialism is merely a mode, the contemporary mode, in which this real enemy makes its appearance. Know your militarist and you will know your enemy; defeat and destroy him, and the Germany that remains is harmless. We are told, by those who take this view, that the Germans for generations have learned from their militarist teachers that war is good in itself, that it is the most glorious expression of a nation's life, that it is the only noble means of fulfilling a nation's destiny. They have been taught that the army is the soul of the nation; they have acquired a 'soldierly morality' that makes it impossible for them to appreciate or share a civilian ideal. What Heine called 'the brutal warrior ardour' of the German people, and what more florid writers call the 'heroic element' in the German soul, is the root of the problem of Germany.

Now, nobody who knows anything about Germany will deny that there is some truth in this view; but it does not contain either the whole truth nor, for us, the most important truth. Taken by itself it is a dangerous fallacy. The important truth for us is that modern Germany has lost, to some extent, its 'brutal warrior ardour'. Of course, it is not so far lost that, when a war has actually been embarked upon it does not come to the surface with most of its old power. But what we must remember is that the leaders who have been popular in Germany are not those who have promised war and more war, but those who have promised a short war, *einen frischen, fröhlichen Krieg*. And there can be no doubt at all in the minds of those who have studied the available evidence, that National Socialism was popular because it promised the achievement, *without war*, of ends, dear to the German heart, for which it had previously been thought necessary to fight. Hitler came before the German people offering them all the nations of the world, offering them the glittering prizes – without war. It is quite certain that he would never have dominated Germany if he had made clear from the beginning that to follow him would involve the German people in a major war. He demanded discipline and the toil and privation of rearmament, but all in order to make war unnecessary.

'In 1939, according to the practically unanimous testimony of competent observers on the spot, the prospect of war was far from being generally welcome to the German people.'[1] This obvious distaste for war may have surprised those of us whose idea of the German people was limited to the belief that it is essentially a militarist people. And when those who believed this recovered from their surprise they became understandably reassured. The German menace, it seemed, was no longer what it had appeared to be. And we began to hear of a German people that, however grievously misled, was sound at heart and pacifist in spirit. But the surprise revealed only ignorance; and the reassurance yet more dangerous ignorance. The Germany we must try to understand, because it is the Germany with which we have to make our settlement, is the Germany that responded with ardour to Hitler's promise of world domination *without war*. The ardour of modern Germany is not for war so much as for loot; they followed Hitler because he promised them loot and the exercise of violence against men who would not or could not meet violence with violence. The enemy with whom we have to make a settlement is this sort of 'pacifist', non-militarist enemy; and this Germany is a far more dangerous menace to our civilization than ever a militarist Germany was, because its weapons are more subtle and because it deludes us with a bogus goodwill.

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[1] *The Problem of Germany*, p. 26. Chatham House publication.

6

One last hindrance to a proper understanding of our enemy must be removed before we go on to consider his character in detail. It is the view that, as a people, the Germans have no special character, and that in dealing with them (as in dealing with any other set of men) we are dealing with individual human beings of essentially the same character as ourselves or anyone else. It is admitted, of course, that the Germans, like other peoples, are to some extent the creatures of their social and political traditions and institutions; but it is asserted that anyone who, going beyond this guarded admission, attributes a special character to the Germans (or any other people), is the victim of some theory of race which every man of intelligence knows to be itself one of the major follies of National Socialist superstition.

Now, I must make clear at once that, when I attribute a special character to the German people, I exclude from my mind altogether the idea of the Germans as a race with special racial characteristics. In no intelligible sense are the Germans a single race, and what goes on in their bloodstream is of no interest whatever. And further, there is no good purpose to be served by attributing to the German people a national character the evidence for which is derived from a reading of the remote past of that people, or of the people which inhabited that part of Europe now called Germany. I have little doubt that the behaviour of the *Germani* of Tacitus was neither more nor less savage than that of other teutonic peoples of that time, and a 'black record' extended into that remote past is, to say the least, irrelevant. Nevertheless, I believe that the German people to-day and for at least a century or two, has, like every other European people, special characteristics, habits of mind and of feeling, which are the residue of the experience of that people during the period of its life as a community. And further, I believe that it is important for us to understand those habits of mind and feeling, because it is on account of these (and not merely on account of what the German people have *done*) that this people is a menace to our civilization. What the Germans have done, their record, may legitimately be used as evidence of their character, but often it is not satisfactory evidence, and in any case it is neither the only evidence to have, nor the most important.

That a people, in the course of some centuries of common life, builds up a character of its own, a modification of human nature, is, I take it, a proposition too obvious to require defence: we know it to be true of ourselves, and we know it to be true of others, and the inherent probability of the thing is overwhelming. This character is not, of course, immutable; it is, indeed, always in a condition of change and modification. And when an individual becomes separated from the common life of his people, by emigration for example, it is to be expected that greater and more radical modifications will appear in him and his descendants; because this common character is not in the blood, but in the mind, and the mind is touched by every experience and every change in the physical and social conditions of living.

Without, then, involving ourselves in any theory of racial characteristics, without indeed going beyond what can be denied only by those whose minds are clouded by some theory demanding that the individual soul be untouched by the world in which it exists, we may attribute to the German people a special character. This character appears in each individual in varying strengths, and some individuals may have only a small share in it; but the social and political feelings of this people are a reflexion of it, and it is those feelings that make them what they are as a community. What concerns us, then, in designing a settlement with Germany, is not the character of the German people in the remote past, nor the possible character it may acquire in the distant future, but its character now. [And if we go to its history, it must not be merely to collect evidence of behaviour that may be written down as a 'black record', but in order to leave no evidence unsifted that may give us insight into the character that it now possesses. The aggressive behaviour of this people under Frederick the Great must not be taken as itself evidence of evil intention now or in the future; it is evidence only of a susceptibility: it is a symptom, not the disease itself. For what makes a people dangerous is not its past transgressions, not its 'record', but an actual disease of character.][iv]

Lastly, in considering the character of the German people we ought also to be on our guard against having our minds clouded by what may be called the 'intellectual black record' of that people. For what is relevant to understanding the character of a people is not the intellectual constructions of its thinkers, even where these thinkers appear to represent a national intellectual tradition, but the habits of feeling and mental disposition of the people as a community. The German people is not a nation of Fichtes; nor, on the other hand, is it a people whose habits of mind are fully expressed in the intellectual constructions of more liberal German writers. And those who stop at Fichte and Treitschke are as deeply in error in judging the German mentality as those who appeal to the liberal tradition in German thought to prove a liberal political instinct in the German people. These and other intellectual constructions are not entirely out of relation with the habits of feeling of a people, but they give only a restricted view of the depth and complexity of those habits. These ideas are not elements of the character of a people, but rather that character as it is reflected in the mind of a theorist. Consequently, we shall do well to leave on one side, in our attempt to understand the German, not only the 'black record' of his behaviour but also the 'black record' of theories that belong to his literature. If we go back to German literature for evidence we shall do better to go to German poetry than to German political theory; and in this poetry we shall find, what is far more significant than a 'black record', the record of a personality in conflict with itself.

7

The Germans in the course of some centuries have acquired and developed certain peculiar characteristics. These have been observed by all the more perceptive thinkers of that nation, and it is these characteristics that must be our guide in considering what sort of settlement we must make after the war with Germany. The first of these characteristics may be called self-centredness, which, when it reaches the proportion it has reached in the German character, is indistinguishable from self-deception. It has been observed on countless occasions that the German people have a remarkable degree of self-consciousness and faculty for self-dramatization. This is joined with a peculiar inability to criticize themselves, a peculiar absence of self-knowledge, and a no less remarkable conviction that nobody else understands them. No people ever spoke so much and knew so little about itself.

How this people came to acquire this character, I will not consider; from one point of view it is an accident of history, from another it may be seen as the result of the experience of this people during the last four hundred years or so. But, however it was acquired, it certainly exists. These convictions of uniqueness and of being misunderstood (in themselves difficult to reconcile except in emotion; for if the Germans were a unique people they could scarcely expect to be understood), have become a habit of mind with the German. They are to be observed in the simplest as well as in the sophisticated members of the nation, and they have separated the German in his own mind from the rest of Europe and bred in him a malignant ego-centric character. For centuries there has been intellectual and commercial exchange between Germany and the rest of Europe, but it has left the sensibility of the German people untouched. Tibet before the admission of foreigners was not more securely shut off from the world outside than the German in his self-centred world of dreams.

As in any community emotionally as well as intellectually convinced of its peculiarity and separateness (it happens, for example, in families), this conviction is joined with one of superiority, and a refusal to acknowledge the standards of the world outside. Discounting all external observation of his character and behaviour as mere misunderstanding, the German has come to live in a dream world of his own, in which to wish is to believe to be true and good; a world which not only refuses to admit the relevance of standards other than its own, but which refuses also to sully its own standards by applying them to the world outside. 'War ennobles the Germans, but it degrades other nations.' Further, like other communities convinced of their unique character, the Germans have developed a tradition of subservience to their own leaders and rulers, a 'nun-like gaiety of obedience', which makes criticism of authority unnatural. And as a consequence of this, the idea of the responsibility of either the ruler or the private citizen for his own actions is one which has no certain place in the dream-world of the German. Indeed, this people as a whole, so deep-laid is its self-deception and so firm its belief in its own righteousness, has always sought and found some external cause for its misfortunes; the fault lies anywhere but in itself. When Nietzsche, and others, observe that the defect of the German character is its lack of integrity, they are calling attention, I think, to this German faculty of escape into a world of make-believe, the faculty which enables this people to absolve itself from responsibility.

Now, if this separation from the world were complete, if this self-deception were perfect, if this dream were unbroken by consciousness of anything else whatever, no mood of doubt could ever cloud the German soul. The German could live in his mood of moral solipsism, unconscious of the existence of other peoples with other standards of character and behaviour, or at least unmoved by their existence. Supported by the conviction of the unique superiority of his way of life, his relation to the world outside would be one of mere dominance, a relation of power. He would feel always an emotion of pride; he would be, what indeed he would always like to appear to be, the strong German. But the necessary condition is not satisfied. Outside the German people there are other peoples, the standards of whose way of life may deserve only contempt, but cannot be entirely ignored. And when the dream existence (in which nobody and nothing save this unique German people had place) is broken, and the German finds himself a man among men, it is necessary for his peace of mind to achieve some relationship with the world outside other than that of mere power. To be misunderstood by those who (though they exist) are inferior, is perhaps inevitable; it is the price one pays for one's unique character. Nevertheless, it would be more comfortable to be understood, to be accepted, to be loved. The world is a grand place in which to dominate, to exact obedience, to enforce discipline; but the character of the beloved conqueror adds something to this and leaves no desire unsatisfied. Even a German understands that to be liked adds something to being important. And so the second mood of the German character makes its appearance: the German who is misunderstood but desires to be understood, the German whose self-contained dream-world is qualified by the half-recognition of a world outside, the German in whose self-conscious dream of superiority has been sown the seed of self-distrust which may flower into a sense of inferiority. At this moment is born the weak German, who projects the sense of the insecurity of his personality upon his position in the world, and reinforces at once the felt necessity of being understood and the desire to be loved.

As I understand it, the German character moves always between these two nodal points; the one characterized by pride and strength, the other by self-distrust and weakness; the one impervious to criticism, the other sensitive to the treatment it receives from the world outside. These two characters have been distinguished as the bad and the good German, but we mislead ourselves with these words. Potentially they are moods of a character, equally dangerous to our civilization. Properly understood, there is no true humility in the weak German; what passes for that is one extreme of a divided character which holds in its centre the vices of the other extreme. The weak German is not the strong German redeemed, the self-deception is still there; the fault is still anywhere but in himself. Indeed this weak German (the so-called good German) is he who desires to be loved but cannot understand why the strong German is not loved.[2] His dream-life has made him credulous, a believer in magic; he desires passionately to find himself in a state of grace, and believes (as the Germans believe to-day that in some inscrutable way Hitler, when all seems lost, will produce a magic weapon and win the war for them) that it may come about secretly, in his dream, by the sudden conversion, not of himself, but of the world.

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[2] The character of this weak German has never been so subtly described as in Vercors, *Le Silence de la Mer*. It is safe to say that no-one who has failed to grasp the truth of the paradox that it is the 'good' German who is the chief danger to our civilization is a reliable guide for us to follow in making our settlement with Germany.

At this point, no doubt, I shall be told that my picture is fanciful and my psychology weak. I shall be told that the proud German (if he exists) is the weak German compensating himself for his weakness, that the Master-race is the creation of the deep uncertainties of the German character, and that the megalomaniac lust for power is the symptom of weakness of character. And for all I know things are that way round. However, I have no wish to tie myself to a theory, and I do not myself suggest there is any simple mechanical-psychological explanation of the German character. In saying what I have said I have had in my mind, not a psychological theory by which this German character may be explained, but the German people as I have known them and as their literature and behaviour have taught me.

English people have, I think, had a false idea of the German character because they have considered Bismarck or Frederick the Great to be the Representative German. If they had turned their attention elsewhere, they would have found in Luther a German more truly representative of his people, in its strength and its weakness, than any other – except perhaps that not dissimilar character, Hitler. Bismarck and Frederick were well-knit personalities, simple and direct, compared with the torn and divided character of the German people. But in Luther there is to be found a man who displays disingenuously the character of his countrymen, and whoever would understand the German people could do no better than study Luther. Here was a man who desired above all to *feel* himself in a state of grace, feel himself saved; just as the German character, in its weakness, desires to be accepted and loved. For Luther, sin, so acute was his sense of it, seemed to make forever impossible that redemption he desired; and it was only when he embraced the idea of redemption, not through goodness, nor through personal suffering, but through the suffering of someone else, vicarious suffering, that the way became clear. *Pecca fortiter et crede firmius*. Human life must swing for ever between these nodal points; human personality, like Luther's own, must forever be divided. What Luther attributed to God, the German attributes to the world outside his own – the power, by its own suffering, of redeeming the German character. Dimly the German perceives he must be redeemed, but with infantile fear he cannot bring himself to undergo the necessary suffering. His sense of his own importance is such that it is not too much to require that the world should be turned into a sea of blood if by that means he can knit the divided elements of his personality. There are other elements of character that make Luther representative of the German character to-day, and not least is the profound sexual unrest that has seized this people, dominating its social and political life and overflowing into and corrupting its way of conceiving all human relationships.[3] 'All peoples love life – but the Germans love death. Perhaps even more than killing. That is what makes them so terrible, so inhuman', said Barthou, twenty years ago. And in the intervening period this necrophilia has tightened its hold upon this master race.

Now, all this is pathological, and possibly dangerous to our civilization, but not actually menacing. What is menacing in the German character is not its strength, not the mood of pride (though this, under the name of Prussianism, has often been selected as the danger), nor the mood of weakness, but the instability of the character. The source of the menace has never been in Prussia itself, but in a people so uncertain of itself that it is glad to be dominated by Prussia (or anything else recognisably its own) if Prussia can give it the feeling of salvation. It is not the passion for war that makes the German a danger to peace, but the dissipation of character that can come to believe in itself only in the external circumstances of war. This character, by reason of its instability, is at the mercy of a Mahdi; and where there is this instability a Mahdi will not long delay his appearance. The part of the Mahdi is to purge his people (as we have seen Hitler purge the German people) of their self-despair. But into the void rush, like the seven devils each worse than the one cast out, the evil propensities of this character. Docility attains its nemesis, self-deception takes the name of self-knowledge, the predominance of appetite and feeling over reason goes unchecked, the dream of superiority becomes the lust to exercise power, the hope of being loved is translated into the desire to be loved by the thing they kill, and the sense of inferiority is transformed into the meanest vice known to human nature – a mindless, passionless envy, determined to destroy all that it cannot appropriate.

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[3] Here again Vercors is illuminating.

I have observed already that what is remarkable about the Germany of to-day is its response to the offer of loot without war, of domination without suffering, of possession without labour. And this, contrasting as it does with the conventional picture of the German as, at least, a creature subject to the inspiration of martial enthusiasm, deserves to be considered more fully for the light it throws on the character of the German with whom we now have to deal. This degenerate German is certainly not the creation of National Socialism; rather it may be said that National Socialism found him and played upon his degeneracy. The belief that other nations have been more favoured by fortune than the German nation has long been one of the supports of the German sense of inferiority. The German has had a conviction that he deserves more and better than he has ever received. This conviction gave no support to a feeling of personal inferiority, quite the reverse; but it did contribute to the general feeling of inferiority that attacked the German character in moods of self-criticism. It was a grievance that the sun shone more warmly in Italy, and that the earth was more fertile in the Ukraine. The signs that are found in the German poets and the mild nostalgia with which the Germans were apt to speak of other, easier, climates, gave perhaps little hint of the latent power of this conviction that Germany had been ill-served by God and man; but now that the German character has given way to its possibilities of evil, we can recognize them in the envy and mad hatred that move this people to loot and plunder whatever can be removed, and to destroy all else. This is not the behaviour of a barbarian who has no conception at all of the meaning or value of what he destroys; the form of the behaviour is barbaric, but it springs from a civilized mind corrupted by envy. It is the expression of that infantile megalomania which seeks to redeem its own sense of inferiority by the destruction of the world. What is characteristic of the German people at the present time is the negative and destroying envy of the man who has lost confidence in his capacity to create, rather than the positive (if scarcely less dangerous) will to make an inferior world feel the weight of his superiority. The ambition to destroy has supervened upon the thwarted ambition to dominate. But neither of these ambitions is foreign to the German character; both have been *released* in Germany, and their home is in the character of the German.

This is a sombre picture. Can it be (I shall be asked) that this is the people who charmed us in Bavaria, who made us feel so much at home? We knew a people in love with music, quiet, gentle, and hard-working. Mine is a picture which many of those who have visited Germany will refuse to recognize. But what we must understand, once again, is that the menace of the German character lies in its instability, not in its violence or even in its weakness; and this instability is compatible with all the charming characteristics we know Germans to possess. In the recesses of the German character lies this instability. The German is dangerous because of his uncertain grasp on himself. And when we come to make our settlement with this people, we must remember what lies in the deep recesses of this character, and discount the misleading appearance of the surface.

How this character will react to defeat we know already. National Socialism, which comes from inside the German, will make no difference to that. It will be difficult, if not impossible, for this people to release itself from its dream world and admit defeat: it will listen readily (as it has listened before) to those who tell it what is already in its heart – that it has suffered no defeat, that if there has been defeat it is the fault of somebody else; Jews, foreigners. This war, it will be said, is something the Germans never sought (which is true; they sought plunder without war), and at the same time, their failure in it was fortuitous. Pondering the history of this war a new myth will be created; the German people will come to understand how nearly they came to winning – indeed, how certainly they must have won but for some small technical or diplomatic mistake: if England had been attacked in June 1940, if the U Boat campaign had been prepared a little earlier and on a slightly larger scale, if Russia had been attacked a little sooner, or a little later. This childish mind, so subject to the appeal of magic, so easily overcome by superstition, will not need to be taught that defeat was just bad luck. And then, looking ahead, the Germans will take a more realistic confidence in the fact that though they lost the last war the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles were never enforced, and that it will be possible once again to slide out of the consequences of defeat. All this is well known to us, and something perhaps has been done to counter it. But not enough. It is difficult for us to understand the dream world of the German, and he will escape into it, one way or another, before we have been able to face him with reality. National Socialism is, for him, only one appearance of this dream, and the destruction of the regime will, in itself, do nothing to redeem his character. 'The Germans must be freed inwardly', said Heine. Not until this comes about will our civilization be free from the danger that lurks in the German character.

8

The considerations we should have before us when we come to make our settlement with Germany are, I believe, few and simple; but it is of the greatest importance that they should be firmly fixed in our minds and that their consequences should be clearly understood. The enemy with whom this settlement has to be made is an enemy of our civilization. Our first principle must be that nothing concerns us but how to protect our civilization from a repetition of the attack he has made upon it. All else is either irrelevant or a matter of less immediate importance.

Our second principle is, that the enemy against which we have to protect ourselves is the German character; not the propensity to violence, nor even its weakness, but its instability. Poland in the eighteenth century was, rightly or wrongly, said to be a danger to its neighbours on account of the anarchy of its political structure; with far more reason we may say that Germany is a much greater danger to her neighbours, because of the anarchy of the German character. In designing our settlement we cannot study the German character too closely. And unless we dismiss from our minds vague generalizations about human nature, we shall find that we have neglected the one reliable guide.

Thirdly, although it is true that the world will never be rid of the danger inherent in the German character as we know it now, until that character is redeemed by the achievement of inward freedom, the redemption of the German character cannot be the express or direct object of our settlement with Germany. And because this, perhaps, is where we shall most readily be lead astray, we must be in no doubt about the reason for it. There are those who, knowing as well as anyone else, that defeat itself will not rescue the German from his dream world or knit his divided character, can perceive no alternative to our undertaking, in conjunction with the rest of the world, what they call the reeducation of Germany. Dangerous fallacies lie in this view – otherwise so attractive for those who conceive themselves to have a mission to perfect the world. It relies, of course, on the obvious truth that until the German character is redeemed there can be no lasting peace; and so far it is a view rooted in reality. But it relies, also, upon a too optimistic view of the malady of the German character. What is required is not merely reeducation, but education. Reeducation may be taken to stand for the attempt that must be made to rescue the German mind from the relics of National Socialism. Germany now, from the standpoint of civilized life, is mentally and morally far below what it was in 1918: it is profoundly perverted. Years of violence, suffered or witnessed or perpetrated, have perverted the social life of the community; self-deception and dishonesty have removed from that life all reliable landmarks of civilization; even the language is corrupt, so that words have a false emotive content that they will surrender slowly.

But, difficult as this process of reeducation will be, it is nothing compared with the difficulty of educating the German, freeing him not merely from the relics of the immediate past but from the deep, ingrained habits of mind that belong to his character. To root out National Socialism is to attack what is merely a symptom of a diseased personality; the education of Germany, the redemption of the German character, is another and greater task. Nor is it one to be achieved either by kindness or by violence, by sympathy or by severity. Indeed, the truth is that the redemption of the German character is a work which the German must do for himself. [If the peace of the world depends upon the education of Germany by outside influence then the peace of the world is a chimera.][v] No one but himself, and that with great pain and difficulty, can rescue the German from his dream world; give him outward freedom, satisfy his ambitions, show him that he is not an outcast, and so far from helping him to win the inward freedom that he lacks, we shall make certain that the lack of it will go still unrecognized and the attempt to win it will be delayed.

It is not, then, because the education of Germany is an undesirable end that makes it a false principle on which to found our settlement with the German people; it is false because it is something that only the German can do for himself, and because it is too remote for a world in danger to take as its only protection. What has been built up in four centuries cannot be dissipated in a generation. It belongs to the eventual Peace, rather than to that immediate settlement with our enemies which must be a preliminary to peace; and to make it our object is to be guilty of that long-sightedness which overlooks what lies between the beginning and the end.

If, then, we can do little to redeem the German character, we must at least make certain that our civilization is protected against the consequences of that character. This, I believe, is all we can do; and this, I am certain, is the only sound principle upon which to base the details of the settlement we must make with Germany. We must pursue relentlessly this object of depriving Germany of all the external means whereby the German people may repeat its attempt to destroy our civilization. We must deprive this people of whatever remains of its power, and we must make certain that it is given no opportunity to rebuild its power. Nothing must be left to chance; nothing must be allowed to go by default. No sacrifice must be considered too great; no interference too petty. In the settlement we make with Germany we must hold ourselves free to do whatever appears to us necessary to deprive that people of its power to renew its attack upon our civilization. Unless this object is pursued with a clear conscience and a determined energy, once again the world will be undone before the German has had time to educate himself.

A settlement of this design will be costly, in spirit and in materials. We must be prepared to bear the cost; and not be misled by the feeling that our object could be achieved at less expense, or by the insidious suggestion that the predicament in which the German character has placed the world is less serious than has been supposed. We shall be told that we are hindering the redemption of the German character. We shall be told that we are depriving ourselves of the benefit which a prosperous Germany might be to the world,[4] that we are paying away our wealth and expending our energy upon mere repression – but we must allow neither these arguments nor any others to deter us from the pursuit of our object. For no greater calamity can overtake the world than for the German character to be let loose once more to wreak its instability upon our civilization.

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[4] The contemporary cant about Germany being a great nation with a valuable gift for the world is ridiculous. Neither Germany, nor any other nation, has anything to give the world that can compare with what Germany has taken away.

If these principles are true and my reading of the German character is not sadly astray, three things, in general, seem to be required for the detailed construction and administration of such a settlement. First, a firm and rational resolve to allow no partial interests or weakening of purpose to cloud our thought or hinder our action. This I put first because it is here rather than elsewhere we are likely to fail. Secondly, technical knowledge – political, financial, economic. To deprive a large and industrialized nation of its power presents a considerable technical problem, about which I am not qualified to write in detail; and since my concern has been with principles of action, I shall not be expected to do so. It is enough to observe here that the solution of this problem will require not only knowledge, but also patience and resolution.

Finally, we cannot succeed without faith in our civilization. If we do not believe in what it is our duty to protect, or if we doubt the value of what it is our desire to protect, then our purpose in protecting it will falter. We must not let the danger implicit in the German character exercise on us a sort of fearful fascination, apt rather to paralyse than to direct our energies; we must make that threat continually remind us to reckon coolly with the German danger and to know clearly the value of the civilization we have saved. Our settlement with Germany cannot result immediately in enhancement or refinement of our civilization; that is not the object of our war; its object is to protect our civilization from external attack; it is for that purpose that we shall defeat Germany, and for that purpose that we must make our settlement with Germany.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[i] LSE 1/1/11. Typescript with autograph corrections. Dated: 'September 1943'. On the final sheet Oakeshott wrote: 'Written in Sussex / Waiting for D Day'.

[ii] Deleted in MS.

[iii] Deleted in MS.

[iv] Deleted in MS.

[v] Deleted in MS.

Eight

The Voice of Conversation in the Education of Mankind

People say life's the thing; but I prefer conversation. Conversation at least is an art: it is, I believe, the most civilized and the most civilizing of all the arts – comparable only to cookery. Cookery began neither (as Charles Lamb imagined) with an accident, nor (as the anthropologists tell us) as a primitive rite of purification; it began when pleasure (and not mere nourishment) was perceived to be the concern in eating – when to eat became an end in itself. And conversation springs from the perception of the pleasure of talk. It appears whenever talk is indulged in for its own sake, without ulterior motive and emancipated from the servility of having to wait upon an appropriate subject, a master or even an occasion.

It is to be distinguished absolutely from enquiry, from argument, from debate and from a symposium under the direction of a symposiarch. Its tone is colloquial, but it is not a colloquy. Where others discern a quarry to be pursued and brought to bay, the man of conversation participates in the chase merely for the pleasure of the ride: for him it is a hunt without a victim. It has a dialectic of its own; circular, without beginning or end. Up go the balls, the plates, the hats, the whole miscellany of the juggler's box; up and over, in and out, spinning and leaping. Nobody asks where they have come from, or on what authority they have appeared; no one is interested in what happens to them when they are once more put away. It is enough that they are moving before us in the air, graceful and enchanting. The art of conversation is not to let them fall.

It is an art that admits of many styles: a classic precision such as looks out on us from the conversation-pieces of the eighteenth century, a baroque profusion of ornament and gesture and anecdote, a gothic profundity balanced always upon the edge of an abyss, or a modernistic fancifulness which implausibly pretends to represent some utility. But, in all its various styles, the art of conversation lies in the acceptance of the convention that talk is neither a search for 'truth' nor the propagation of a belief, but is to be understood as a partnership in intellectual pleasure. One might say that the participants in a conversation must have everything in common except their opinions.

There are people who regard conversation as a kind of intellectual bottle-party at which the most welcomed guests are those who come with some exotic contribution – a flask of Imperial Tokay, or a bottle of some native decoction from the Antipodes. And desiring welcome (like the rest of us), they bring with them a carefully prefabricated response and angle for the opportunity of uttering it. Such, it appears, was the view of Oscar Wilde. But the sweetness of conversation is not the aroma that rises from some long matured wine when at last, and with ceremony, the cork is drawn; it is the aroma of the wine-vat, the sweetness that belongs to the extemporary and the unrehearsed. There is, indeed, a certain inertness about even the most brilliant epigram which makes it inappropriate in conversation: it detains the flow of talk without being able to set it off in a new direction.

In the art of conversation, the old, perhaps, have the advantage of the young; but only the old who, besides the maturity and self-control they have acquired with age, have not lost the intellectual irresponsibility of the young. The man of conversation must at least appear to be an amateur. And, like piano-playing, conversation is an art which is felt to lack something essential if there is no element of the *virtuoso* in its practitioners. Oddly enough, it is often difficult to get women to enter into a conversation. With them talk has a disconcerting propensity to become serious. This is more common in the very young than in the older; but even age brings with it no certainty of improvement. Women have many of the qualities required in conversation; they are gaily inconsequent and have little attachment to the truth, but what often disqualifies them is the feminine passion for management and for wanting to know where they are being taken before they get there.

Conversation, then, springs from the movement of present minds disposed to intellectual adventure. Its enemies are the tedious, pertinacious talkers, resisting the flow without being able to give it a fresh direction; those who, like a worn gramophone record, distract the company by the endless repetition of what may have begun by being an observation but, on the third time round, becomes the indecent revelation of an empty mind; the noisy, the quarrelsome, the disputatious, the thrusters, the monopolists and the informers who carry books in their pockets and half-remembered quotations in their heads. Conversation cannot easily survive those who talk to win, who won't be silent until they are refuted, those who won't forget or who cannot remember, those who are too lazy to catch what comes their way or who (like men of putty) are too unresponsive to do anything but let it stick. Like a lover, a good conversationist must never be more than half-serious, and must never take his partners more seriously than he takes himself. But in conversation, as elsewhere, vices are often more readily corrected by other vices than by virtues. I have seen absolute dogmatism brought to a halt when it has been met by the dissolving force of absolute omniscience. And the genial flow is sometimes more easily recovered when slow sententiousness is interrupted by an impatient cascade of words than when it is received with the generosity native to a conversation.

The nature of conversation is revealed in the observation that anything may be its subject, so long as it is treated conversationally. We speak of God and the high price of drink in a single quarter of an hour; of Spinoza and the weather. Anything thrown into the air will make a beginning. There are, of course, subjects that fit occasions. Not all occasions are suited to what Dr Johnson called 'solid conversation'; and no doubt it was a perception of this that led Walpole to remark that he always talked bawdy at table, because it was a subject in which all could join. But, paradoxically enough, it is the things we feel most deeply about that offer themselves as the best topics. I suppose all good conversation, in the end, comes round to the only two subjects worth talking about in any manner: love and death. But once a beginning has been made, the dialectic of conversation must be given its head; bit and bridle are out of place. And in conversation the value of talk is the effect it has upon the present company; it has no other significance. The only achievement to be aimed at is to give some new twist to the spinning ball, sending it off again in a new direction and with a new impetus. Consequently, we do not pause when once our meaning is clear – do not pause even to finish the sentence – but pass on immediately. The object is not to persuade or to convince, not to overpower an opponent by reasoning or by eloquence, not to inform or to improve, but merely to speak in such a manner that what is said leads on to something else. Even charm of voice will secure more sympathy than the most cogent reasoning if it is too slowly or too deliberately unfolded; and to detain the discussion for more than a short time is a breach of the etiquette of conversation, which, indeed, is more readily understood by those who are disposed to listen to a person than to look for light on a subject. No matter what we have of thought or emotion stored away in the depths, unless it can be fitted instantly into the kaleidoscopic movement of the discussion, added to the fleeting pleasure of the moment, it is valueless. Of its nature, a conversation wanders, responsive to every breeze. The lust of domination (which inflames the mind more than any other passion) is absent; there must be no thought of proving anything, no thesis to be unrolled, no plan to be followed. Success does not lie in the conclusion of the discussion by some unanswerable pronouncement; that is failure. Success is to maintain this delicate aerial equilibrium, to keep alive what has miraculously been given life. We may win a point, score a hit; but that is incidental: nobody wins the conversation. And if we hinder or obstruct, if we lay an ambush or explode a mine, it is not to discomfort or to silence an opponent, but only in the hope of inducing some extraordinary effort in a friend. Like those of the art of cookery, the achievements in conversation are transitory, and consequently its pleasure is absolute in each moment. The pleasure of argument may be mixed with regret. We perceive too late (perhaps long after the argument is ended) what, if we had said it at the time, would have concluded it in our favour. But since this sort of conclusion has no place in a conversation, this sort of regret can never cloud the pleasure we have in it. What was begun in partnership can be continued alone without the apprehension of bitterness. It is with conversation as with gambling, of which Fox said that there is the pleasure of winning and the pleasure of losing and it is difficult to determine which is the greater.

I have called the art of conversation the most civilized of the arts; but it is not the greatest. It is a fine, not a mechanic, art; but it occupies a middle position. It is a mean between extremes and therefore appropriate to the civilized man, who is neither a genius nor fool. For the great it is difficult; for the stupid it is impossible. The man of powerful genius is apt to find not only restriction in the conventions of conversation, but futility in its pursuit; force and power, intellectual or other, have no place in it. Whistler merely displayed the indifference of a great talker to this art when he said: 'Let *me* discourse, for if other people are going to talk there can be no conversation.' And the dullard, having no conversation in himself, the first thought always prevailing without the reply of a second, has the faculty of none with other men. Of course, if one is an Irishman, one may achieve greatness in this art; but there is something inappropriate in a great conversationist, and even his achievement will never be the equal of poetry or music. But the demands of conversation are not negligible: it requires that each should play his part, but without losing himself in it. A genius for conversation belongs only to those *bel-ésprits* whose touch is light, whose mind is supple and well-stored, whose vision is clear, but who have little sense of the worth of their talents. A certain disillusion is perhaps necessary for the practice of conversation: it is the art of the thriftless genius, appropriate to the brilliant failure, the genius *manqué*, and the inebriate. It is an intellectual art, and therefore good conversation requires more than the inspiration of the Graces; but it requires less than that of the Muses. Somewhere between these ideas lies its world; a world, both in its greatness and in its littleness, fit for mortals. In that sweet decadence of Athens, when Rome had destroyed its political power and wisdom its political ambition, when the philosophers had been called away and when the Muses had returned to Olympus, the art that remained was the art of conversation. It was this that still distinguished the Greek from the barbarian; and it is this art that always distinguishes the civilized man from the barbarian.

In every art there is the mastery of some material; and the material which the art of conversation has for its own is the possible and the probable. With matters of 'fact' and with the dull routine of truth and error, it has nothing to do. And when the occasion turns upon mere certainties, the man of conversation knows that his art is out of place – unless, perhaps, his imaginative genius is equal to the task of dissolving 'fact' into the limitless possibilities from which it emerged. The man of conversation is like the man of business who regards the activities of buying and selling (even of railway tickets) as enterprises which should always involve the conversation of bargaining. For, 'fact' is like a fixed price; it emerges as a balance among possibilities and is capable of being dissolved again into the components from which it sprang. Indeed, it might be said that the art of conversation is precisely this art of dissolution; it disintegrates the fixed shapes which practical men have imposed upon the world and reveals the approximations of things commonly considered remote from one another.

So far I have considered conversation as a social activity, as a manner of talking, an exchange of utterances. This is how Aristotle understood it; and it provoked him to enquire into the ideal number of participants. Love and friendship, he recognized as relationships between two, jealousy as a tension between three: for a conversation he demanded five. And here, perhaps, he displayed his usual brilliance of perception. For, although a *tête-à-tête* between friends might seem to provide the perfect conditions for conversation, in fact it falls short in certain important respects. Excellence in conversation requires not only the relaxation of intimacy, but also a variety and unexpectedness of utterance, and indeed, a certain emotional detachment in its participants; and it may well be that with less than five these characteristics are not apt to appear. Talk between three easily degenerates into a contest in which two are allied to get the better of their companion; and when four are present the evenness of the number may be expected to discourage oddity of opinion. And in *limiting* the number to five one can only suppose that Aristotle was reflecting the common experience that when more than five are gathered together it is probable that a dogmatic barbarian will be present who will break the spell and convert conversation into argument or enquiry.

But every social activity is the image of an individual character. And what the practice of conversation requires is not a certain number of participants, but a certain disposition.

Conversation is merely the voice of the *anima naturaliter conversationalis*. And those who are disposed to think conversationally will use the voice of conversation even when they are alone and speak only to themselves. Indeed, all the characteristics of conversational talk – the readiness of sympathy, the forbearance from dogmatism, the naïve pleasure in the exchange of ideas, the generosity in giving and taking, the intoxicating blend of the consequential and the inconsequential, the internal discipline combined with the absence of a route to be taken or a conclusion to be reached – these characteristics are only the images of a certain manner of thinking, of a certain intellectual temperament which does not require the presence of others in order to be active. The man disposed towards conversation is, at bottom, not a man preeminent in talk, but one who enjoys a certain character. He will have an amused tolerance of himself; he will be sceptical about his own opinions; he will not take himself seriously, but he will be interested in what he finds himself to be; he will accept without dismay, but also without approval, his own want of greater perfection; and he can ask others to take him for what he is because he has already taken himself for what he is. And the emblem of this character is not to be found in the great talkers of history – in Dr Johnson, in Burke, or in Coleridge – but in Michel de Montaigne, who could at once examine himself candidly and without impatience and forgive himself for being what he found himself to be. Conversation, in short, is a disposition of the human soul; it may often reveal itself in talk, but it is capable of civilizing any of the activities in which human beings engage.

One of its earliest achievements was to civilize philosophy. It was the genius of Plato that first perceived that philosophy is, or should be, conversation, and rescued it for a brief moment from dogmatism. Philosophy, he said, is a dialectical discussion, and this he distinguished from an eristic discussion. In an eristic discussion, the participants are opponents; each is trying to establish his own point and to convict the other of error. But in a dialectical discussion the participants are united in a common purpose. The aim of each is to show that his own view is the one which the others really believe; or conversely, that it was himself, and not the others, who began by denying a view upon which all are really agreed. It is at once an exercise in politeness and in tactical humility. And the impetus of such a discussion is spent, not when one triumphs over the other, or when each agrees to differ, but when all simultaneously discover that each has been right all the time. In this vision of a dialectical discussion Plato saw, united for all time, philosophy and conversation. And it may be supposed that if the arrogance of some of Plato's doctrines had not been sweetened and softened by this dialectic, we should never have heard of him; in death he would have gone down to join the forgotten company of dogmatic philosophers. But how sadly fallen is this word 'dialectic' in these days: the word that once opened to Europe an endless vista of civilized intellectual excitement, stands now for the spurious and uninspired monologue of a Teutonic ventriloquist.

In spite of all that the Greeks could do for them, the Romans could never quite understand this conception of philosophy. A contest that ended neither in victory nor a treaty of agreement passed their comprehension. Cicero records that when Lucius Gellius arrived in Athens as proconsul, 'he called together the philosophers who were there at the time and urgently advised them to come at length to some settlement of their controversies. He said, that if they really desired not to waste their lives in talk, that the matter might be settled; and at the same time he promised his own best efforts to aid them in coming to some agreement.'[1] This precise Roman arbiter failed to understand that the last thing in the world desired by these blameless philosophers, conversing under the trees, was a final settlement of their amiable controversies. Conversation had civilized philosophy. And, if the situation has somewhat deteriorated since that time, and if we now suffer an unhappy recrudescence of dogmatism, that is a defect not peculiar to the philosophy of our time.

But if there is once activity more than another which has benefited from the civilizing touch of conversation, it is politics. That politics is a subject suitable for conversation, only a barbarian would deny. But the view that I want to suggest is that politics is good for nothing else. Moreover, this approximation of politics to conversation is, I think, the gist and meaning of democracy. Democratic politics has been perverted and brought into disrepute by being misidentified with the rule of the people, the government of the majority, the propagation of a dogmatic faith and the pursuit of a manner of living to be imposed equally upon all men. It is, in fact, the politics of the man of conversation. And how it came about may be understood in a brief abridgment of our history; for, remarkably enough it was Englishmen (who are otherwise not greatly disposed towards conversation) who first explored the recognition that politics is supremely eligible to be a conversational art.

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[1] Cicero, *De Legibus*, I.xx. 53.

Politics occur when men apply their intelligence to the arrangements of a society. In this sense the Middle Ages were blessed with little or no politics. It all began, so far as we are concerned, when our civilization was seized with an unholy rage to reform. And when religion was to be recast from the bottom up according to new dogmatic principles, it was not to be expected that the rest of the arrangements of society should be exempt from the visitation of this plague. Dogmatic politics appeared; and Europe, unprepared for this onslaught, was over-run by the barbaric armies of abstract intelligence. But just when the over-night inventions of a people drunk with the wine of abstract ideas (being used only to the small-beer of custom) threatened to return the world to primeval chaos, mankind was saved by the perception that politics, alone among the subjects of discourse, belongs solely to the realm of conversation: dogmatic intelligence was met by conversational intelligence, and what we now call 'politics' is the byproduct of this encounter. To whom we owe this perception is a secret lost in the obscurity of the past. But whoever he was, he was certainly a second Prometheus for whom the world waited for salvation from the fire that the first had poured into the belly of the race. At least, he was the first democrat; and his gift was the gift of oil and wine, the power to neutralize this ideological rage. And the deluge, by which it was intended to turn the dark satanic mills designed to grind out the illusion called 'social perfection', was diverted from its mischievous purpose and set to water a pleasure-garden for the recreation of the race, before it emptied itself harmlessly into the sea when all things are lost in a sweet oblivion.

At its lowest, democracy appeared as a device for talking out the dogmatic reformers; at its highest, it is the politics of conversation. And how perceptive this identification of politics with conversation is, how appropriate the disposition of conversation is to politics, is nothing to puzzle the civilized man. In conversation, freedom and intelligence subsist together and without rivalry; and a society which understood politics as conversation could never earn the melancholy epitaph which Acton pronounced on the era of the French Revolution: 'the age preferred the reign of intellect to the reign of liberty.' Singleness of purpose, so destructive of a civilized order of society, is foreign to the character of the politician who is a man of conversation. And such a man, also, will escape the *hubris* that places unlimited faith in his own dogmatic intelligence. But, more important than anything else, it is the politics of conversation that can rescue us (and has on occasion rescued us) from the great illusion of all other styles of politics – the illusion of the evanescence of imperfection. All life is necessarily imperfect; it is full of possibilities, but sparing of certainties. The politics of conversation alone recognizes this necessary imperfection. It is the politics which, when it is bad, does less harm than any other, having internal resources of its own which hold it back from irreparable commitments. It is the only style of politics that recognizes unequivocally that rulers and subjects alike are neither gods nor heroes, but mortal men in a world of mortal men. And we, unfortunate perhaps in the hour of birth, must gather together all the powers of conversation in order, once more, to turn aside the still undefeated forces of barbaric dogmatism which have only to continue in the way they are going to bring in a new dark age of enlightenment.

> If it were possible the gates of the new year
> Should open to a panorama of all time:
> If it were possible that each day's closing door
> Should leave us elsewhere than before another door:
> If it were possible to see the end
> And work for it, and have it bless the means:
> If it were possible to reach the sanctuary
> And worship there Utopia
> Who never moves, who lies – no, not in State –
> But robed impossibly in frozen life:
> If these, good God, were possible,
> I still would keep the keys that I possess
> To reason, love, and immemorial time
> And not become a Communist.

I began with a contrast between life and conversation: I will end by making that contrast less abrupt. For, as I have set it before you, conversation is not only a manner of talk; it is also a manner of thinking, a disposition of the human soul, a reading of human life. Life has been theorized on many different analogies, and normally it is lived on an analogy. It has been thought of as a battle, a race, a journey, a feast, a spectacle, a commercial traveller's round, a predicament, a vast expanse of sand to be got over somehow without leaving a foot print, and a game of cards; and it has been lived in manners appropriate to these images. Some of these analogies are pretty far-fetched and implausible; others impose upon life a narrowness to be tolerated only by the old and the disillusioned whose lives have already begun to contract around them. Indeed, the only one that appears at all convincing is the last: life understood as a game of cards. This at least recognizes the two main ingredients of human life: chance and choice. And if we include those two degenerate innovations (obviously invented in the interests of inferior players who, not content with chance and choice, look for additional opportunities of winning) – the invention of trumps and the joker – it might be said to recognize also divine intervention – Grace to supplement Nature. The shuffle and the deal clearly correspond to something in human life: they are the part-human disposition of the counters to be played with: facts to be accepted, but also to be complained about. 'I must complain that the cards are ill-shuffled till I get a good hand', said Swift. And the wisest of Sancho Panza's maxims was: *Paciencia y barajar;* Patience and shuffle the cards. And the play? Do we not play out our days as we play out our cards, taking them as they come, not knowing what they will be, exercising such skill as we have, hoping for a lucky card and sometimes getting it, but more often getting either just the wrong one or misusing such good fortune as comes our way?

But even this analogy is imperfect. Chance and folly in human life are infinite and cannot be reduced to fifty-two kinds. And while in life as at cards, everything is irreparable, the game has an inflexibility not belonging to life, which is not normally eased by such rigid conventions. A closer analogy is to be found in conversation. Indeed, it seems not improbable that it was the pursuit of this art (in which talk is without a conclusion) that gave us our present appearance, men being descended from a race of monkeys who sat in talk so long and so late that they wore out their tails. But, be that as it may, I think the values and the conduct appropriate to mortal human beings are those that belong to conversation. And if, as I suppose is the case, a 'civilized' manner of living is one that accepts the unavoidable conditions of human life and makes the best of them, then a conversation may be recognized as its emblem.

The human relationship inherent in conversation is the least vulnerable of all relationships and the one most appropriate to the conditions of human life. It is close, but without the touch of imperiousness; it is a relationship delicately balanced between giving and receiving and one that has no ulterior object. It has neither the sometimes too great intimacy of a friendship, not the egotism of passion or of business. It engages both the emotions and the intellect, but without exhausting the one or unduly taxing the other. It is a relationship of equals, and of beings who (unlike gods) have but a short while to spend together, and (unlike animals) can afford to spend it in pleasure. In conversation, as in life, every object must cease to be what it first seemed, and none can ever be what the whole soul desires. Neither in life nor in conversation is enjoyment to be sought in the end, but only in each flying moment. In the long run we are all dead; and there is an end, but no conclusion, to every conversation. And if civilized life consists – as by a plausible exaggeration it may be said to consist – in never claiming as a right what may be secured as a favour, in being merciful rather than just, generous rather than severe, accommodating rather than dogmatic – these, also, lie in the character of the man disposed towards conversation. In conversation, as in life, chance and choice are unconfined, united only upon rare and notable occasions. In both, poise in imperfection is the only perfection, and achievement is not to be mistake for a conclusion. In both there is no prize to be won, no winnings to collect and take away for later enjoyment. For, in life everything is left behind except posthumous fame; and fame is too like being caught in the underground in the rush-hour to be greatly sought after. In conversation we cannot always scintillate and we must sometimes be content to listen, and in life we cannot always be young and fleet-footed and in love; but in both success, if it is to be found anywhere, lies in being able to keep awake and responsive until the time comes to adjourn. There is the same absence of plan; the same ultimate inconsequence combined with momentary passages which seem to have an internal logic. And in mortality, as in conversation, there is nothing serious.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[i] LSE 1/1/46. Typescript with autograph corrections.

Nine

The Philosophy of History

There will always be some subjects of study which, in spite of their interest and importance, do not appear in the normal undergraduate curriculum of a University. Sometimes this is merely a matter of convention and tradition, and differs from one University to another and from one country to another. But often, it is because the subject is thought to be inherently unsuitable for undergraduate study. And so far as the Universities of Great Britain are concerned, this is true of the philosophy of history. I doubt if this subject is to be found in the undergraduate curriculum, either in history or philosophy, in any British University. This, however, does not mean that the subject is not studied in British universities; it means only that it is not normally prescribed for undergraduate study. And I think there are two reasons for believing it to be a sound tradition which reserves this, and certain other subjects, for post-graduate enquiry. The philosophy of history, in any of the forms in which it has appeared in European thought, preeminently calls for a long and varied preparation if it is to be pursued profitably; and further, the form which it now commonly takes is a study whose achievements are still so small and so tentative that for some time to come, it will lack the *body* and relative stability which would make it an appropriate part of an undergraduate education.

Since Voltaire, in the eighteenth century, invented the name 'philosophy of history', it has, in general, stood for three different studies, each of which is pursued by scholars today, although it is not now customary to speak of them all as the 'philosophy of history'. Two, indeed, have almost ceased to be called by that name and have left the third in undisputed possession of the title. Nevertheless, even the briefest review of the place of the philosophy of history in

British Universities must recognize the three different studies which, for many years, shared the name.

The first of these is the study of the course of past events in an attempt to detect some general principle or principles which would make the whole thing hang together. Formerly, such a principle was found in the idea of God as the source of all that happens, but the disappearance of Providence from the vocabulary of the historian opened the gate to a new field of speculation and research. Many different principles, and different kinds of principles, have been suggested to take its place. Some writers have thought of these principles as 'laws of historical change', not unlike the laws which scientists have observed in operation in the natural world; while others have considered them, rather, as general, abstract ideas appearing in different forms at different periods of world history and giving a general meaning to the whole course of events. Hegel, for example, found the unifying thread of history in the idea of Freedom.

This enterprise of discovering a pattern or plan in the course of world events has already inspired many great works of scholarship and imagination and, it is safe to say, will in the future inspire many more. But it is an exacting pursuit, and perhaps not once in a generation will a contribution of first-rate importance be made to it. Also, it is easy to see that it is better to call this study, simply, 'history', rather than the 'philosophy of history', because the works it inspires differ from other historical works only in the largeness of their scale. Consequently, it does not surprise us that the latest of these attempts is called by its author, Professor Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*. And, so far as English scholarship is concerned, this is the one great work of our time in this field. It would, then, be absurd to expect the qualities required for such a study to be widely spread in the Universities of any country; but there are few British universities which offer no opportunity for work of this kind.

The second pursuit which has gone by the name 'philosophy of history' is a study of an altogether different sort. It is concerned, not primarily with the course of events itself, but with the problems and methods of historical research, with what may be called methodology. This study was first set on foot by French scholars in the seventeenth century, and by now has great achievements to its credit. In the schools of history in most British Universities, professors will be found interested in this subject, and it is a study to which English scholars have made great contributions. But, on the whole, it must be admitted, that it has been developed more systematically on the Continent – in France and in Germany – than in England, where its vitality has usually depended upon an outstanding personality rather than upon a continuous tradition of inquiry and teaching. The Institute of Historical Research in London is, perhaps, the nearest thing we have to a centre for this kind of study. But it is a study which, with a clearer perception of its real nature, has now ceased to be thought of as the 'philosophy of history', and has been recognised as a specialized study of historical method, or, as it is now sometimes called, historiography.

The third enterprise, the study which still retains its hold on the name 'philosophy of history', differs radically from both the other two. For it, 'history' doesn't stand for the course of events, but for a certain kind of *enquiry*, a certain sort of knowledge, and for it, also, what is interesting is, not the methodology of the enquiry, but the validity of its results. The problems it sets out to elucidate are the nature and presuppositions of this enquiry called 'history'. And the aim of the study is to reach some conclusions about the nature of historical truth and the validity of historical knowledge.

Now, you can see at once that anyone who embarks upon this enterprise requires to have at his disposal, as part of the materials of his study, a considerable body of historical writing. If a man is to discuss the validity of a certain form of inquiry, he needs to be supplied with some examples of it. And since it is only in the last hundred and fifty years or so that historians have gone about their business in a critical manner, it is understandable that the philosophical study of historical knowledge has had to wait until comparatively recent years for the inspiration and the opportunity to make a beginning. Hence the relative smallness of its achievement, compared, for example, with the achievement of a similar sort of study, which was earlier set on foot, of the nature and validity of scientific knowledge. Indeed, much of the character of this 'philosophy of history', has, so far, been determined by the unavoidable lateness of its appearance. For example, at the time when philosophers were beginning to consider the nature of historical inquiry, the prestige of scientific inquiry was already enormous; and it seemed clear that the most satisfactory way of demonstrating the validity of historical knowledge was by showing it to be only a form of scientific knowledge, different perhaps in subject matter, but identical in object and method. This was a mistake. But it was some time before the present more profitable inquiry into the differences between scientific and historical knowledge was begun. However, it is now long since this kind of 'philosophy of history' has found its place in the world of scholarship and has begun to explore its appropriate field of inquiry.

This kind of 'philosophy of history' will, naturally, flourish only where the study of history and the study of philosophy go on side by side. For, although it is no part of the function of this philosophy of history to give directions to the historian about how he shall think and write, the relation between the two is reciprocal. The philosopher, in this enquiry, uses the work of historians as at least part of his material; and the historian, in his own enquiry, may, perhaps, benefit from the philosophical criticism of some of his more general ideas – ideas such as cause and effect, growth and decay, development, change, progress, success and failure.

These conditions, history and philosophy studied side by side, exist and have long existed, in every British University. But, though the potentiality of the study of the philosophy of history is nowhere absent in England it has (not unnaturally) been most fully realized in the University where the study of philosophy and the study of history have long been traditionally allied – that is, in Oxford. Nevertheless, it required, also, some external stimulus to turn the minds of English scholars in this direction, a stimulus which came first from Germany, and later from Italy. But it may be said that, since about 1870, this kind of philosophy of history is a study to which English scholars have made a notable contribution, and that Oxford scholars have played a leading part in it [beginning with F.H. Bradley].[ii]

In no subject does English scholarship run easily in the harness of a school of thought. Great investigators are apt to reveal their greatness more in the *impetus*, than in the precise *direction*, they give to a study; and if they found a school, it is more likely to be a school of enquiring than a school of thought. This is certainly true of the philosophy of history. It has felt the impress of strong characters, such as that of the late Professor R. G. Collingwood, but neither he nor anyone else, has confined English thought on this subject to a particular direction, or established the preeminence of a particular doctrine. Indeed, this is a study in which at the present time in England, there is a strong tradition and a growing opportunity of enquiry, with little or nothing to restrict the direction in which it may run.

EDITORIAL NOTES

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[ii] Inserted from broadcast version.

Ten

Richard Hooker

1. It is characteristic of sixteenth century writers on politics, even of those who achieve a certain philosophic detachment, to write *under the influence of their immediate circumstances.* Some, of course, are more bound to circumstances than others; and very few achieve any high degree of philosophic detachment.

But in looking over these sixteenth century writers to find one who illustrates most comprehensively the movements of thought which were afoot, and at the same time exhibits some degree of detachment from immediate circumstances, I think we shall find our choice coming to rest upon an English writer – *Richard Hooker.* And I want to try to draw together what I have said about the sixteenth century, by considering Hooker.

There are *other writers* who represent more coherently *one or the other of the contemporary* lines of thought. *Bodin,* for example, reflected most deeply upon the character of the new, territorial sovereign state. But, while he shows the characteristic sixteenth century *mediaeval manner* of thinking about the new political situation, his circumstances *did not impel* him to take *direct account of the new religious situation*. He is a lawyer and a Frenchman; and France in the sixteenth century was, in many respects, less far on the road to becoming a typical new state than some of the other European states. The Edict of Nantes is a confession of immaturity because it was a confession of weakness.

And again, if we are looking for a straightforward writer in *the current Natural Law tradition*, who exhibits not only the *re-birth of Thomism* which sprang from the *Council of Trent,* but also some of the other tendencies of the century, we may find such a writer in Suarez, whose *De Legibus,* is, in its way, a masterpiece, reflecting current preoccupations in a philosophic manner.

But neither Bodin nor Suarez shows with quite such clearness the ambivalence of sixteenth century political philosophy as Richard Hooker. And consequently I *have chosen Hooker* as my *representative political philosopher of the sixteenth century*.

His situation is *neither* the settled situation of, e.g. *a Catholic* in a still undisturbed Catholic state, *nor* was it the settled situation of e.g. *Calvin in Geneva*. He was faced with the sixteenth century problem of *religious change and disunity*. Nevertheless, his situation was *not* that of a *defender of a religious minority* – he had not the incentive of Calvin directing the Huguenots in France, or Jesuit defenders of Catholicism in England – the incentive *to adapt arguments to a merely temporary emergency*. And yet he had a real intellectual problem to consider.

2. Hooker is a *controversial writer*. The whole of the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* is bent to a controversial purpose. There is nothing new in that. *Augustine's* philosophy is cast in the form of a defence of Christianity against those who contended that it had destroyed civilization. Aquinas' emphasis on *Reason* is partly an answer to the *intellectually anarchic tendencies of his day*. Hobbes always wrote, as Montgomery fought, with a picture of his opponents in front of him. Sound philosophy may spring from controversy: but controversy usually leaves its mark and it is important to detect it.

Hooker's immediate purpose is to demonstrate that the *Puritan opposition* to the Elizabethan Church settlement was baseless, to demonstrate that the Puritan claim not to conform to the settlement was inconsistent with the nature of civil society. The manner of his defence of the settlement involves him in the construction of a political philosophy.

The *manner of his defence*, also, was determined by *the sort of arguments* which would be convincing alike to friends and enemies. *The arguments* he uses were, for the most part, *well-worn*; the *authorities* he appeals to were authorities which his world respected – *The Scriptures, Augustine, Aristotle, Aquinas; Scotus.* He had at his disposal the whole armoury of mediaeval ideas. But what is interesting is that he uses it *in defence of a new state of affairs*, a state of affairs which had emerged in the sixteenth century. And what is exciting is the manner in which he, *cautiously*, and often perhaps without exactly knowing what he was doing, goes *beyond his authorities*, and finds himself on *the road to a position* which, though it had been adumbrated by *Marsilius of Padua*, was to be finally elaborated by only Hobbes in the next century. Hooker as a political philosopher stands between two worlds, and it is on account of this *ambivalent position* that he *represents* his century so well.

3. Hooker's *starting point* is, on the face of it, *remarkably unphilosophical*. What he undertakes to do in the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* is *to defend, not law* in general, nor positive law in particular, but *a specific positive law* – the *Second Act of Uniformity* (1559) – against the attacks of the Puritans.

The *Puritan case* against this statute was that it *could not be justified by Scripture*, whereas their own proposed form of Church government could be. And what *Hooker* undertakes to show is that *there are no rational grounds* for refusing obedience to this admittedly positive man–made law and that all subjects of Elizabeth were bound to observe this statute, *1. Eliz. Cap. 2.*

4. The first contention which Hooker found himself called upon to answer was that of the *narrow Puritan scripturalism* – *that one law, the Scriptures, must be the rule to direct in all things in so far as 'taking up in a rush or a straw'*.

Hooker's answer to this is constructed under the inspiration of *Aquinas*: the setting out of *the whole hierarchy of law* under which the *natural* and the *human universe exist*, in order to show that *laws do exist outside* and *in addition* to the Scriptures. His purpose is to put Scriptural authority in its place in a hierarchy of authority.

5. *Law*, in the widest sense, for Hooker, as for Aquinas, is *not primarily a command*, the imperative of a superior authority, but '*any kind of rule or canon whereby actions are framed.*'

Hooker finds there to be *a hierarchy of laws* in the universe composed of *four main types of law*, and several subsidiary types: his scheme follows that of the *Summa Theologica* of Aquinas, but at one important point modifies it. This modification is, indeed, supremely important for understanding

Hooker's position: it is very significant that he should have found it necessary to introduce this modification.

(i) *Eternal Law*.
This is the *lex aeterna* of Aquinas. But with Hooker it is 'two-fold'.

(a)[1] It is the law which, springing from *the nature of God*, gives order to all the works and operations of God himself. It is this law which gave 'form and measure' to that work of God which we call *the creation of the world*.[2] It is in virtue of this law that the works of God are not merely violent and capricious, but orderly and (in a metaphorical sense) just.

(b)[3] The *second eternal law* is that which God gave, *at the creation*, to all created things. 'All things which are as they ought to be' are so in virtue of their conformity to this law. It is this law which gives *place* and *station* to *each kind of created thing* from the *angels* to the least inhabitant of the created world.

(ii) *The Law of Nature*.
This is 'the manner of working which God hath set for each created thing to keep'. But this, again, is two-fold.

(a) There is first the *law of Nature* which governs that part of the created world which is *not endowed with reason or will*. Either inanimate, vegetable, or animal.

This is the law in virtue of which 'the natural generation and process of all things receiveth order of proceeding.' This is that *law of Nature* which orders the movements of the *planets* and the *tides*, and which orders the *animal* and the *vegetable* world.

Its characteristic is that it is *obeyed 'unwittingly'*, by creatures who lack the power to do other than obey. This is the law which governs the mere 'natural agents' and 'instruments' of God. It is not a *command*, it imposes *no obligation*, because *disobedience is impossible*.

But according to this law of Nature, which is the law of Nature in respect of that part of nature which is 'nothing else but God's instrument', the things of the world not only serve God's purposes but also 'serve one another's good'.

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[1] I. 148

[2] The world is the *work* of God vs. pantheism and hylozoism.

[3] I. 152

(b)[4] But there is another *Law of Nature*, which orders the activities, not of the mere '*natural* agents' or 'instruments' of God, but of the '*intellectual and voluntary*' agents of God. This law comes to those for whom it is appropriate, those who possess Reason and Will, as a *command* and an *obligation*. They obey it *not as automata* and 'unwittingly', but *voluntarily* and *consciously*. It therefore creates an obligation.

Now since there are two classes of intellectual and voluntary creatures, there are two types of this kind of Law of Nature.

(1)[5] A *Celestial and Heavenly Law*, which orders the activities of *Angels*, and in virtue of obedience to which angelic conduct is good.

(2)[6] A *Law Rational, or Law of Human Nature*, which orders the activities of the other class of rational and voluntary creature – *Man*.

Men, by virtue of their *Rational character*, *perceive the commands* of this law and *perceive them to be obligatory*. And the operation of this law is to guide and control, not men's actions, but their *will*. (Augustine)

This *natural-rational law*, then, tells us 'all those things which men by the light of their natural understanding evidently know to be…good or evil for them to do'. It is the law 'whereby man in all his actions is directed to the imitation of God'.

'Man[7] in perfection of nature, being made according to the likeness of his Maker, resembleth him also in the manner of working: so that whatsoever we work as men, the same we do *wittingly* work and *freely*; neither are we according to the manner of *natural* agents any way so tied, but that it is *in our power* to leave the things we do undone'.

Nevertheless,[8] human action is not without *a guide* and *the power* of perceiving the directions of this guide. This *guide* is the *Law of Nature*; and this *power* is Reason. For human beings 'the laws of well-doing are the dictates of right Reason'.

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[4] I. 154

[5] I. 153, 159

[6] I. 153, 161, 178

[7] I. 166

[8] I. 168

But what is the operation by means of which human reason perceives what ought to be done? How do we know what is our duty?

In[9] general, by observing 'signs and tokens' – 'some more and some less certain'.

'The most certain token of evident goodness is, if the *general persuasion of all men* do so account it'.[10] 'The *general and perpetual voice of men* is as the sentence of God himself'.
These[11] laws, so perceived, 'do bind men absolutely even as they are men': they compose the universal standard of right and wrong conduct for the whole human race.

But for human life as we know it, the guidance of this *Law Rational* or Law *of Human Nature* is *insufficient*. For two reasons:

(1) Because, for their mutual enjoyment of the things of the world, *men require to be associated* with one another, and *such association is impossible* without an 'order expressly or secretly (tacitly?) agreed upon touching the manner of *their living together*'.

(2) Owing to the *Fall of Man*, the *natural Reason* has become *clouded* and unreliable in its apprehension of the Law of Nature. The signs and tokens have become less significant. And further, *Reason and Will* have become *separated*; when Reason directs, Will does not always submit. Consequently, *additional guidance is required.*

This[12] additional guidance is supplied by the third order of law which has its place under the Eternal Law.

(iii) *The Law of the Commonweal, Positive Law or Civil Law.*
This order of Law is *man-made*. But it is *subordinate* to the *Law of Human Nature*, which is itself only an application of the Eternal Law to rational creatures. It may be subordinate in two alternative manners:

(1) It may *republish* some duty which is already a duty under the *Law of Human Nature*, in the same manner as a Statute may republish what is already a *Common Law* duty or right. These are '*mixedly human laws*'.

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[9] I. 172

[10] Cp. Cicero.

[11] I. 184

[12] Bk I. X, XVII

or

(2) it may *create a new duty*. But if it does this it *must not* be a duty which *conflicts* with the *Law of Reason* or the *Law of Human Nature*. These are '*merely human laws*'.

Either way, then, *positively* or *negatively, Positive Law* is a *direct* or an *oblique* reflection of the Law of Human Nature. In the case of 'mixedly human laws', their justice and propriety consists in their being *exact transcriptions* of the *Law of Human Nature*. In the case of 'merely human laws' their justice is determined by a double criterion:

(a)[13] that they *do not conflict* with the *Law of Human Nature*.

(b) that they are '*fit*', '*convenient*' and '*expedient*', and '*orderly agreed*' for the ordering of human society.

But[14] when either 'mixedly human laws' or 'merely human laws' have been publicly determined to be fit and useful, they become binding upon the society – for if this were not so, if every individual were at liberty to pick and choose, guided by his own interest, or by 'private and probable resolution' of his own judgment, between what laws he should obey and what he should refuse, there would be an end to 'all possibility of sociable life in the world.'

Now, you will observe a certain ambiguity in this theory of Hooker's in respect of *Positive or Civil Law*.

There is: –

(1) *an absolute criterion of justice* – congruity, or at least negative congruity with the *Law of Reason*.

(2) *a range of choice* within which men may republish the *Law of Reason* in the form of a *civil law*.

(3) a subordinate criterion of obligatoriness (if not of justice) – the *consent* or *agreement* of the members of the Commonweal concerned, given in a *known and orderly manner*: 'public' recognition.

Theoretically this ambiguity is resolved by means of the scholastic distinction between a *causa formalis* and a *causa materialis*, a final and a proximate cause. The final *cause* of all order in the universe, including Civil order, is the *Eternal Law*; and under that, for human beings, the *Law of Reason*. But the proximate cause of civil order is the *consent of the members of the Commonwealth concerned*. And this is made a tenable position by means of the theory that 'the general persuasion of all men' (or 'consent') is a *reliable 'sign* and token' of *Rationality* and of *goodness* in the rules of behaviour.

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[13] I. 116

[14] I. 225–6

Nevertheless, whatever we may think of this theoretical defence, what is important to observe is that *Hooker thinks it necessary* to put himself in the position of having to offer it. And we shall return later to consider the significance of this.

(iv)[15] There is, however, a *fourth order of Laws* which Hooker, significantly, discusses after he has discussed *Positive or Civil Law*. It is the *Law Supernatural*, a *gracious* gift of God, the chief repository of which is in the *Scriptures*. This is what Aquinas had called the *Law of Revelation*.

The precepts and canons of conduct revealed in the *Scriptures* are of two general sorts:

(1)[16] Republication of laws of conduct which men by their natural reason already know to be obligatory. In these 'God's own testimony' is merely added to the 'natural assent of reason'.

(2) Laws of conduct which, without denying reason, *go beyond what reason evidently tells us*: 'supernatural duties'.

For (1) the Scriptures are useful but not necessary; for (2) the Scriptures are *necessary* – without them we shall not know what we ought to believe or do. And for (2) the Scriptures are *sufficient*. But 'supernatural' duties *never conflict* with 'rational' duties; they are *additional* duties, which do not overlap natural duties.

6. So much, then, for what may be called *Hooker's political philosophy*.

(1) In the main it seems to be a *Natural Law theory* of a traditional kind. And it draws its inspiration from *Aristotle, Cicero, Augustine, Aquinas* and a variety of other sources, and confirmation is found for it in scriptural texts from the *Old and New Testaments*. There are words and phrases in it that derive from the *Institutes of Justinian*. Indeed Hooker has ransacked the whole of the traditional learning on this subject.

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[15] I. 198–221

[16] I. 207

(2) But beside this main character, there is another. *A more positivistic doctrine* of political obligation. This doctrine also has its pedigree. It is not without its counterpart in both *Cicero* and *Augustine*, but the more recent writer who had developed it (besides *Scotus*) was *Marsilius of Padua*. Its appearance in Hooker is however particularly significant. *It seems almost as if he were forced* into this position (later to be embraced in a much more unqualified form by *Hobbes*) in order to make his defence of the Elizabethan Church settlement against the Puritan claims.

7. But before we consider the quality of this side of Hooker's political philosophy, there are *two points of fact to be noticed*, or rather *two assertions of fact* which Hooker makes against the Puritans.

(1) Hooker asserted that *no precise system of Church government* had been laid down *in Scripture*; and further, that the system of Church government as established in England by I Eliz. cap. 2 is the one which *best accords with reason* and with what can be *gleaned* from a study of the Scriptures, and with the particular *traditions and history of England* i.e. it accorded with Natural Law and Scriptural precept. And he buttressed this assertion with the observation that *even the Puritans did not deny* that there were certain things in Church discipline which *are properly variable* according to time and place and circumstance generally.

(2) The second assertion was that *the Church is not a separable part of the general order of the Commonwealth* and consequently that *obedience* is *due alike* to the *laws civil* and *ecclesiastical* of the Commonwealth. In other words, there is no ground for refusing to obey the laws ecclesiastical on the pretence that the Church is a spiritual order ideally independent of the civil order. 'With us', says Hooker, 'one society is both Church and Commonwealth.'

This was a bold assertion, but one which had behind it both a mediaeval tradition and the new political experience of the sixteenth century. It was an assertion which Marsilius *of Padua had theorized*; and one which had found expression in earlier *English Protestantism*. But, of course, it was *not an assertion which could be maintained* in respect of the *primitive Christian Church*. Its ground was the history of Christianity which, from being the religion of *a minority* had become, since the twelfth century, the *indigenous religion of a civilization*.

It was, of course, the assertion which Hobbes advanced[17] as the basis of a Christian Commonwealth: 'Temporal and spiritual government are two words brought into the world to make men see double and mistake their lawful sovereign'.

Hooker's position, then, is that 1 Eliz. cap. 2 is *as legitimate* a statute of the realm as any other, and the fact that it is concerned with the government of the Church is irrelevant from the standpoint of its obligatoriness.

8. There are, then, *two sides* to Hooker's political philosophy:

(1) His *emphasis on Reason and the Law of Nature*, which he used to *combat the Puritan* emphasis on *Inspiration, Revelation* and the authority of the mere word of *Scripture*. (2) His emphasis on *Authority*, and in particular *the authority of positive law*, which he used to combat the Puritan emphasis upon the supposed sole *authority of Scripture in ecclesiastical matters*.

And I think it may be observed that *wherever Hooker improves upon Aquinas* it is always in the direction of an *emphasis on the Authority of positive law as such*.

E.g. (1) in *Aquinas* there is *no separate order* of law governing the *Angels*: in Hooker there is. And it seems that the purpose in adding this order of law is *polemical, not philosophical*. It enables Hooker to lay before his readers *the most dramatic example of disobedience* in the Universe and to point to the consequences.

> A part of the angels of God have fallen and their fall hath been *through a voluntary breach* of that law which did require at their hands continuance in the exercise of their high and admirable virtue.

And he points out that *pride, the following of a private judgment*, was the cause of the fall of the Angels.

(2)[18] In the passage where Hooker is considering the *Law of Nature* as it applies to the *non-rational agents* of God – what we call the natural world – Hooker's whole emphasis is upon the *total calamity which would* overtake the universe if 'the moon should wander from her beaten way', if 'the times and seasons of the year blend themselves by disordered and confused mixture', if, in short, natural objects should fail to follow their Law and behave according to their 'private wishes'. 'See we not plainly', he says, 'that *obedience of creatures* unto the law of nature is the stay of the whole world?'

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[17] Oakeshott, *Leviathan*, p 306.

[18] I. 153, 155, 159

The[19] emphasis is not on the justice of the law, its rationality, but upon its authority merely as rule and command. Law itself, not justice, is 'the mother…peace and joy'. Disobedience, in any sort, has as its consequent 'confusion'.

9. There is in Hooker's political philosophy a *half-concealed, unobtrusive modificatio*n of all that firm *Natural Law theory of Aquinas*. Aquinas was certain that just Law is *not 'will'*, but *'will' commanded and guided by Reason*. *Tyranny*, for Aquinas, is law which is not according to Reason: and tyranny may be opposed.

But Hooker could not afford to leave a loophole for Puritan dissidence. He could not rest his case solely upon the *Rationality* of the Second Act of Uniformity. While asserting the rationality of just law, he asserts also the *obligatoriness of all positive law* whatsoever. And he defends this position by asserting that that the *Reason*, in virtue of which a law is just, is 'public reason'. You will remember that this was to be exactly Hobbes's question:

Law, no doubt, is Rational, but *whose reason* shall prevail?[20] And his answer had been anticipated by Hooker – at least, *not private reason*, the private and probable conclusions of individuals.

Nevertheless, Hooker has a *firm anchor* for his theory, an anchor of which even the Puritans would recognize the cogency even if they denied its use in their particular position.

The ground on to which, in the end, Hooker retreats is the entirely conventional ground – the common ground of all sixteenth century and mediaeval political thought – the *divine authority of all law* – and its conventional consequence – the obligatoriness of at least *passive obedience*. He retreats, that is, upon the oldest and best authenticated doctrine of Christian politics – the doctrine which went back to St Paul.

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[19] I. 228

[20] Oakeshott, *Leviathan*, p 176.

10. Our conclusions, then, are these: –

(1) Hooker, in the new situation of the sovereign territorial state of the sixteenth century, set about the construction of an appropriate theory of political obligation.

He recognized the chief novel feature of the situation – the appearance of *Church and State* in place of *Regnum and Sacerdotium*: an ecclesiastical order established by specific positive civil laws.

(2) He goes to the *stock of mediaeval political* ideas to find something to his purpose. He ransacks all the known *authorities* of the ancient and the Christian world.

(3) He finds irresistible the *theory of Natural Law* as it had been propounded by Aquinas.

(4) But he finds that this is insufficient for his purpose, and adds to it the idea, later to be stated so succinctly by Hobbes in the words: 'It is not wisdom (reason), but authority that makes a law'.

In doing this, in placing this emphasis on the *authority of all positive law indifferently*, he finds his position insecure unless he has recourse to the most conventional of all mediaeval political ideas – the *divine authority of all legitimate government*. This is the only argument which *nobody* in the sixteenth century would deny to be cogent, however inconvenient it might be.

(5) But, Hooker remains, at bottom, a rationalist; he is unwilling merely to retreat upon a mere assertion. And in going further – in his argument about 'public reason'[21] – he puts his foot on the road that leads to Hobbes.

(6) The interest in Hooker, then, is the manner in which he finds himself obliged to take a road on which the Natural Law theory is an insufficient guide.

He exhibits the divided mind of the sixteenth century in the ambivalence of his political philosophy; and he is a link which shows Hobbes to be less of an eccentric than he might otherwise appear.

EDITORIAL NOTES

i LSE 1/1/51. Typescript with autograph corrections. 'M. Oakeshott' in Oakeshott's hand in the top left hand corner of the first sheet.

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[21] 'Reason' = 'public reason'

Eleven

The Whig Interpretation of History

Men, it appears, took to the study of the past, just as they took to the study of the natural world, without misgiving; and they seem often to have assumed that there was no alternative to the manner of thought they found themselves employing. Subsequent reflection, however, revealed that this was not the case, and the manner of scientific and historical activity has come to be modified by the consideration that has been given to the general organizing ideas of these enterprises. Reflection upon the activity of being an historian, however, seemed at first less necessary than similar reflection upon scientific enterprise, because the study of the past seemed to involve no special technique, and because (developing in modern times in the shadow of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century), it seemed safe to allow the wakefulness of the scientist in this respect to take the place of self-criticism on the part of the historian; [it was enough for the historian to be able to distinguish fact from fiction, the essential from the accidental, and to discern cause and effect in a manner which suffices us in practical activity.][ii] But this also proved less satisfactory than was expected. And it is now a long time since historians began to consider for themselves, often in an informal manner, the organizing ideas of their activity.

Professor Butterfield's contribution to this enterprise has been notable, and began some twenty years ago with a small book which has recently been reissued. Contemplating the manner of a good deal of historical writing in modern times, it seemed to him to manifest certain habits of thinking which were questionable not only on general grounds, but also because the historian found himself obliged to abandon them whenever he was engaged upon the close inspection of any specific situation in the past: they were possible only when an abridged story was being told [, and there they were corrupting].[iii] These habits of thinking Professor Butterfield, with a characteristically paradoxical parochialism, called the 'whig interpretation of history'.

In general, this 'interpretation' stands for the habit of reading the course of events backwards, and in this manner making history a success-story. 'The Whig historian is apt to imagine the British constitution as coming down safely at last, in spite of many vicissitudes; when in reality it is the result of those very vicissitudes of which he seems to complain.' And it may be remarked that the current device of explaining the historian's activity by assimilating it to that of a detective is an often unintended recommendation of a whiggish manner of thinking. The Whig historian, then, commits himself to a simple linear view of the course of events, and regards himself as under a discipline to elucidate that exclusive stream of actions and happenings in the past which seems to hold within itself the seeds of [what he thinks important in][iv] the present. His heroes are those who belong to this lineage, men whose lives seem to foretell the present and who are singled out on account of their 'modernity': the rest are non-contributors or are recognized to have a place in the story only as obstructionists. In this way, having an eye only for what in the past seemed to be akin to the present, it is not difficult for him to hold that 'history is on our side'. And the study of the past seems to provide him with the opportunity, not only of determining who was on the right side, but also of expressing moral approval and disapproval.

It is not at all remarkable that this has been, and still is, the pattern of much historical writing. It represents the naïve interest in the past which any man whose main interest is in the present might be expected to show. It may be that in forecasting its qualities as a racer the most important thing about a horse is its sire, and consequently that, when this is being considered, we shall properly fix our attention upon the male line of its pedigree. But it may also be perceived that this will be unsatisfactory, and even positively misleading, if our object is the elucidation of the appearance of something less specialized than a single characteristic. And indeed the manner of thinking which composes the whig interpretation of history not only gives an *ex parte* view of the past, but also a contracted view of the present. What is, in fact, a resultant, or even a byproduct, of conflicting purposes and interests is made to appear as the consummation of a single homogenous stream of activity triumphing over opposition and obstruction.

The historian, then (if we consider him to be intent upon such genuine knowledge of the past as is available to him) will find this 'whig' manner of thinking a hindrance. First, it persuades him to seek in the past only that which can be directly assimilated to the present; and then, when he leaves the broad lines of the story (such as may appear in an abridgment) for the close study of a particular occasion or a particular change, it betrays him. 'Both the method and the kind of history that results from it would be impossible if all the facts were told in their fullness.' But how shall he avoid what he recognizes as a hindrance, and with what more appropriate manner of thinking shall he replace this which has revealed its inappropriateness?

No doubt he will seek to escape the misdirecting pressure of the present by schooling himself to look in the past for precisely that which is unlike the present: history will become for him a study of the manner in which the past differs from the present. And in order to avoid the imputation of providing a mere success-story, he will have a special care for the defeated on any occasion, because it is their contribution to the situation which is most likely to be overlooked or misjudged. But vigilance for differences and care for failure compose only a crude reaction to the error he seeks to avoid: they represent a concentration of attention merely upon what the whig interpretation neglects. His emancipation will not be complete until he has achieved a manner of thinking for which every subsequent situation is understood (so far as the evidence allows it to be) as the product of the total previous situation, a view of historical change in which one concrete situation gives place to another concrete situation and in which each situation is a precipitation which cheats the projects and intentions of every actor – the elucidation, in short, of an historical process of which he and his fellow workers are the inventors, not in the sense of going beyond the evidence, but in the sense that it is the product of an activity (a consideration of *all* the evidence) from which the participants in the change are *ex hypothesi* excluded.

Faithfulness to this manner of thinking will be seen to carry with it some revision of our notions of what is to be got from a study of history and of the sort of questions it is proper for historians to ask themselves. Abridgment which takes the form of detecting in the tangled complexity an essential stream of events will no longer be appropriate. Whatever abridgment there is must be the elucidation, not of [necessary and sufficient][v] general causes or conditions or of homogenous lines of development, but of the structure of the complexity. Further, it will be recognized that it is beyond the competence of the historian to elicit from his story judgments about the value of human actions or judgments about the moral worth of human conduct. In neither of these matters, nor in any others, can there be a 'verdict of history'. The historian will not excuse because, aware of his incompetence, he forbears to judge.

In his later work Professor Butterfield has elaborated considerably upon these views, but he has never departed from the main line he laid out with so much subtlety and originality twenty years ago. That he was right to select the 'whig interpretation' for criticism, few historians will doubt; for, though it is not the only manner of thinking which belongs to our tradition of historical study, it must certainly be counted the most influential – in spite of the fact that it would be difficult to find any notable writer who embraces it without modification. It need not be required of every historian that he should be able to bring to the surface and expound in general terms the characteristics of his manner of thinking; and, of course, an historian may have immaculate habits of thought and yet write indifferent history. But, when we consider how much more tenaciously historians cling to their organizing principles than to the detail of the story they have to tell, the usefulness of occasionally reflecting upon them is not to be doubted. The net effect of such reflection may be great; but it may be expected to reveal itself mainly in small abstinences and avoidances and in a way of writing history which accords a little more closely to the kind of evidence which is at the disposal of the historian. [And it is better that this should be done by an historian meditating upon his art, than by a philosopher who, going deeper, would on that account provide something less relevant.][vi]

One characteristic of all Professor Butterfield's writing on this subject should not escape notice, namely, the subtlety with which he chooses, and the firmness with which he adheres to the level of his analysis. He writes always as an historian reflecting on his art; indeed, much of the value of what he says springs from its being suggested, not from the outside, but by the activity of studying the past. What he writes, however, is always coming up to and bordering upon a philosophical consideration of the nature and validity of historical knowledge, and a less balanced writer might be expected to give way to the temptation of overstepping his chosen limits in an illusory attempt to ground his views more firmly. But perceiving that there is something to be said which, if it may perhaps be superseded by the philosopher, at least cannot be replaced by a philosophical analysis, Professor Butterfield adheres to his intention without nervousness or exaggeration.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[i] LSE 1/2/1. Typescript with autograph corrections. H. Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History*, Bell and Sons, London, 1931, republished 1950.

[ii] Inserted from shorter version.

[iii] Inserted from shorter version.

[iv] Inserted from shorter version.

[v] Inserted from shorter version.

[vi] Inserted from shorter version.

Twelve

The New Society

The six chapters which compose this book are the lectures broadcast by Mr Carr earlier this year. His enterprise is to examine the 'social revolution' which introduced what he calls the 'New Society', to investigate the character and problems of that society and to recommend it, either as unavoidable, or beneficent or both, it is not quite clear which. It is a large theme, but Mr Carr's manner is brisk and the reader will understand and allow for the difficulty of compressing what has to be said into small space. His sincerity is transparent, his opinions are to be respected; he has something interesting to say on all the topics he takes up and the reader is rarely in doubt about his meaning. But his arguments do not appear always as well founded as could be wished.

In order to demonstrate the unavoidableness of the 'New Society' Mr Carr pursues what he calls the 'historical approach'. He collects our destination from the way in which things appear to have gone in the last one hundred and fifty years. But in his hands the demonstration becomes something of a conjuring trick, though one whose secret he is at no pains to conceal. The historian's task, he says, is 'to analyse the past in the light of the present and the future which is growing out of it'. But since the present and the future are the 'New Society', the only past which comes under observation is that particular stream of events or 'causes' which seem to comprise its pedigree. And if 'history' is confined to the intimations in the past one hundred and fifty years of this 'New Society', there is, of course, no difficulty in showing that 'history' is on the side of the 'New Society'. And this point of view not only determines Mr Carr's view of the broad character of the past, but also most of the detail. To say, for example, that 'the result of free competition has been to destroy competition' is to utter a half-truth similar to that contained in the proposition that 'toleration was the result of the Protestant Reformation'.

The 'course of history', then, is set in favour of the 'New Society', and the past in so far as it is observed not to contribute to this result is a set of 'ruins on the shore that lies behind us'. And further, there is (for an historian) a curiously abstract strain in Mr Carr's writing: while seeming to contrast the 'New Society' with various 'societies' in the past, what in fact he is doing is to contrast it with various abstract ideas of society. For example, he takes Elizabethan legislation at its face value, presenting it as the structure of Elizabethan society, whereas, then as now, the main activities of men are carried on in the gaps in this ideal structure. *Laissez-faire*, the 'uncontrolled capitalist system', the 'night-watchman state', all the *clichés* of historical abridgment are here accepted and confirmed, and the notion of historical study as the *un*learning of these rough generalizations is far out of sight. Contrasts, transitions and changes are often presented with a quite unreal abruptness. And the consequence of this style of observation is that, for example, the significance of Russia in the international scene is taken to stem exclusively from the Russian revolution, whereas it is well known that Russian imperialism was detected a century ago as the coming major problem of European diplomacy.

The characteristics of the 'New Society' are planning and socialism – that is, planning for the social purpose of equality. It is further a 'mass democracy'. 'We are committed to mass democracy, to egalitarian democracy, to public control and planning of the economic process, and therefore to the strong state exercising remedial and constructive functions'. It is a pity that, when describing the 'New Society', Mr Carr should have resort to the slogans of political propaganda: he writes as if 'fair shares for all' were an unambiguous, scientific concept adequate to define the character of the society. Mr Carr has nothing to say specifically about the nature of the control to be exercised by the strong state; and if there is a difference between a man being directed to perform certain work in a certain place and a man being obliged to work if he is not to starve (his so-called 'economic whip'), he considers the first preferable to the second.

However, Mr Carr is not at all blind to the difficult problems which the 'New Society' brings with it, and his best pages are those in which he discusses these problems. But here again, is there not something a little disingenuous or sloppy in saying that the great problem is that of 'reconciling democracy with planning for socialism' and 'adapting to the mass civilization of the twentieth century the conceptions of democracy found in earlier highly individualistic periods of history'?

Spengler (with whom Mr Carr is a trifle brisk) thirty years ago prophesied the supercession of 'culture' by 'civilization' in western Europe and advised us all to become technicians if we wanted to be on the side of history: Mr Carr's advice is not quite so candid, but what it amounts to is that if you want to be an individualist or to enjoy some personal freedom (in the old, out-of-date sense) in the new collectivist, egalitarian, mass society which is the unavoidable result of a hundred and fifty year's development, you must be prepared to live in the interstices of the society and to put your trust in its imprecisions.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[1] LSE 1/2/1. Autograph. E.H. Carr, *The New Society*, Macmillan & Co., London, 1951. Printed in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 12 October 1951, p. 642.

Thirteen

The New Science of Politics

Professor Voegelin of Louisiana is not the sort of writer who often looks round to see if his readers are keeping up with him. He sets a smart pace and ignores the cries of 'wait for me' which many of his followers will find themselves uttering. Moreover, he is always on the move; if one rests for a moment in the shade of his wisdom one looks up to find him already out of sight. And he has a disconcerting habit of pointing one way and going another. He announces in his title a New Science of Politics (which is not so much new as the restoration of political science after the unfortunate interregnum of positivism), but this turns out not to be the important thing. And having selected 'representation' as his theme, he allows it to grow to such dimensions that it soon becomes almost unrecognizable under that name. But when those difficulties are overcome, and when the reader has resigned himself to a vocabulary rich in abstract nouns and one in which any word is liable to acquire a couple of extra syllables, he will find himself being led on a remarkably interesting journey by a guide of rare knowledge and intelligence. Indeed, with all its faults, this book must be considered one of the most enlightening essays on the character of European politics that has appeared for half a century.

The lead in to the argument is by way of a denunciation of the errors of the positivism of the second half of the nineteenth century. Positivism as a manner of political reflection toyed with an imitation of physics, neglected to observe that 'different objects require different methods' and ended in destroying political science by attempting to make it '"objective" through a methodologically rigorous exclusion of all value judgments'. On this tack, with Max Weber in command, it finally ran political science aground at the turn of the century. But 'for two generations now, the sciences of man and society have been engaged in a process of retheorization' which has resulted in the appearance, at least in outline, of politics 'restored to the dignity of a theoretical science'. It must be confessed that our attention here is being directed to something that Professor Voegelin never succeeds in getting into focus: what should be clear remains shadowy, and the specification of the errors of positivism is not altogether convincing. But the reader will, perhaps, be wise not to puzzle himself unduly about it, but to move on in the hope of being able to collect the character of the New Science of Politics, not from what is said about it, but from the exemplification of it which the book promises.

Professor Voegelin's method (which he denotes as Aristotelian) is that of examining the 'language symbols' of our political vocabulary and by a process of 'critical clarification' to pass from political experience to political theory. The central symbol of our politics is 'representation'. At the lowest level this is simply descriptive of certain facts of current political practice: in calling certain institutions 'representative' we have begun to interpret our political experience to ourselves. But this is only a beginning. At another level 'representative' ceases merely to characterize a certain kind of political institution and appears as the symbol of the form of all political societies, the essential condition of political activity.

> The process in which human beings form themselves into a society for action shall be called articulation. As the result of political articulation we find human beings, the rulers, who can act for the society, men whose acts are not imputed to their own persons, but to the society as a whole…when his acts are effectively imputed in this manner, a person is the representative of a society.

Thus, it may be said that 'a political society comes into existence, when it articulates itself and produces a representative', and 'representation' comes to be understood not merely as a particular kind of articulation, but as the articulation which is inseparable from the existence of a political society.

But the concept of 'representation' calls for further clarification. Historical societies not only exist in virtue of 'representation' but they understand themselves as 'the representatives of something beyond themselves, of a transcendent reality'. They are replicas in the medium of human society of cosmic order, little worlds reflecting the universe. And the way lies open for the conception of rulership as the task of securing that the order of society is properly representative of cosmic order; 'the existential representative of a society is its active leader in the representation of truth'. Moreover, this 'truth' may be variously understood. The 'truth' represented in 'the early empires' was understood to be 'cosmological'; the 'truth' represented in the culture of Athens was 'anthropological' (a truth about human beings); and the 'truth' which was the peculiar contribution of Christianity was 'soteriological'. But with 'the discovery of the psyche as sensorium of transcendence' a conflict between the 'truth' of the individual explorer and the 'truth' which the society, through its existential representative, was active in representing, became potential.

Professor Voegelin notices numerous difficulties which this view of things throws up, but he is not explicit about the relationship between the different levels of the concept of representation; there is a logical loose end here, or at least an unstated assumption. His main business, however, is to interpret European politics in the light of this analysis. He begins with the Roman Empire, and all that he has to say cogently supports the view that nobody can hope to understand the politics of modern Europe who is not prepared to probe the darkness of the first four centuries of the Christian era. No doubt there are later occasions when European politics take a tack in a somewhat new direction, but the direction and impetus they received in these eventful and obscure centuries has never been superseded.

The impact of Christianity upon the Greco-Roman world culminated in the perception that political society itself should not be regarded as the representative of 'soteriological' truth. But this achievement, over which the genius of St Augustine presided, sprang from the suppression rather than the defeat or destruction of opposing doctrines identified as heresies, doctrines which remained as unresolved tensions within European civilization. Politically the most important of these reappeared with renewed strength in the twelfth century, which, from this point of view, may be regarded as the beginning of the peculiar complexity of modern politics. The achievement of Christianity had been at once the recognition and the 'de-divinization' of political society; the characteristic of modern politics is the attempt to 're-divinize' political society on a new pattern. And the new 'divine' political society (in which the characteristic human activity, with government as the leader, is a mystical work of self-salvation) is identified as a recrudescence of Gnosticism.

Stated thus crudely, the thesis may appear implausible; and indeed Professor Voegelin is more successful in identifying the moods and phases of the process than in accounting for its appearance: the contingencies that entered in are largely neglected. But in two central chapters he displays the process in a manner which, in spite of some exaggeration, carries conviction. Moreover, he reinforces his argument with an elaborate example – that of seventeenth century English Puritan politics. And in this connection there are admirable passages on Hooker (who early detected the character of the modern political Gnostic) and Hobbes (who tried to release the tension by denying anthropological and soteriological truth altogether).

The final chapter is one of criticism. The politics of modern Gnosticism are recognised as the dominant strand in modern politics, but not the whole; and at the same time they are recognized as inherently self-defeating. The mechanism of the self-defeat is simple but conclusive. The Gnostic (whether he is 'Puritan', liberal, progressive or communist) interprets society and its order as an eschaton; he does not want society to exist unless its order represents the specific type of 'soteriological truth' in which he believes. His aim is to secure the monopoly of existential representation in his society, but only as a means to imposing a particular kind of transcendental representation which nevertheless is unavoidably destructive of the existential order. The 'truth' he embraces is a dream that bears no relation to the *conditio humana* and in the end it can be maintained only by forcible suppression of whatever opposes it. The criticism is neat, but at some points it is uneconomical in its reliance upon unnecessarily extensive assumptions. Perhaps the most serious defect of the whole account is the underestimate of the strength and vitality throughout modern European history of what may be called neo-Augustinian politics as both the partner and opponent of Gnostic politics.

This is a book powerful and vivid enough to make agreement or disagreement with even its main thesis relatively unimportant. It cannot fail to instruct even those whom it does not convince. In spite of its comprehensive sweep, it escapes vagueness; and there are reservations enough to make its exaggerations harmless. There are many loose ends and some unfulfilled promises; but it is an honest and unpretentious work of scholarship, and scattered up and down it there are many acute observations on contemporary politics. And if the reader puts it down with the conviction that he has been given a new understanding of European politics rather than a glimpse of a New Science of Politics, perhaps that is what was intended.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[i] LSE 1/2/1. Typescript. E. Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1952. Printed in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 7 August 1953, p. 504.

Fourteen

Freedom and Power

1. The intention is to consider the question of Freedom in a practical manner, without any philosophical refinement.

The two components of human intercourse to be considered are: (i) Exercise of freedom; (ii) Submission to power.

Taken absolutely, these are exclusive extremes in human conduct: the positive and negative poles of social life. Absolute freedom is equivalent to complete absence of submission. Not, of course, absolute independence, but absolute independence of submission to power. But both forms of activity appear in social life; and both are unavoidable. Moreover, almost every occasion presents itself as a mixture of freedom and submission. Submission to power is *never complete* – (1) the exercise of power is itself an exercise of freedom; and (2) even the most categorical and comprehensive command cannot be obeyed without the exercise of freedom. And activity which is recognized as the exercise of freedom is rarely unqualified by an element of submission to power.

It may be the business of philosophy to explore a world in which the opposition between these extremes is theoretically reconciled; but as practical people we are not concerned with abstract absolutes, but with concrete relativities. The question worth considering is the manner in which social activity is composed out of a mixture of these two elements.

2. This question *is* worth considering because:

(i) Within certain limits the composition of the mixture is what we choose to make it. We cannot abolish either of the elements but we can, and do, take thought about their relations and proportions.

(ii) The mixture is unstable. The exercise of power (and consequently the invitation to submission) is always pressing for a larger share in the mixture.

Some people find the cause of this in a principle of evil in human nature, an evil *animus dominandi*. But there are other and more practical reasons for it. Circumstances in recent times have promoted an increase in the exercise of power. And, in any case, power is more readily organized, more easily accumulated and has greater opportunities of growth than the exercise of freedom. Consequently, it is to be expected, other things being equal, that its demands will be more effective.

(iii) The exercise of freedom, therefore, if it is to form a significant part of the mixture in any manner of living, often needs special protection and encouragement.

3. In any society, power is exercised (and submission invited) in varying degrees by a great variety of persons and groups of persons. Few people are without the opportunity of exercising power; master and servant, employer and employee are relationships which involve an element of power. Beyond these, there are in most modern societies considerable concentrations of power, involving wide and often subtle forms of submission: any great concentration of wealth or influence, institutions like the BBC, great industrial and commercial concerns and public corporations are concentrations of power. But in most societies power is exercised preeminently by what we call 'the State': government is normally the greatest single concentration of power with the greatest opportunity of growth. Hence, although the problem of the exercise of freedom is raised wherever there is a significantly large concentration of power, it is raised in its most comprehensive form in relation to government.

4. Thought on this subject usually revolves round the question: *What is the most desirable proportion of the two ingredients – freedom and power – in the mixture which composes our way of living*? And the answers will naturally differ; and it is difficult to see how to resolve the differences. But there is another, easier but not less important, question: *How, when we are considering the proportions of the two elements in the mixture, are we accustomed to think of the relationship between power and freedom*? This is the question I want to consider. And if we enquire how European peoples are, and have been, accustomed to think about the relations between power and free-

dom, I think we may observe two different attitudes. Generally speaking, these attitudes are exclusive of one another, but they are both current ways of thinking; and the most profitable thing I can do is expose them to view.

5. (i) The starting point of the first manner of thinking about the two ingredients of social life is *the overwhelming experience of submission to power*. There are many different historical circumstances which make this starting point plausible if not unavoidable.

(a) *in primitive societies*, submission to power is the main ingredient of human relationships. Few enjoy any significant freedom. The main experience is one of submission.

(b) and in other societies – eg. *Tzarist or Communist Russia, France in the eighteenth century* – the general character of the experience offered is one of having been *born in prison*. There is, of course, exaggeration here. In no society can activity be confined to submission to power; but in some, *the main emphasis is in this direction*.

(ii) Given this experience, the exercise of freedom must appear as a manner of behaviour which has to be *instituted, introduced from the outside and superimposed*. Freedom, that is, appears first as something which may be *descried*, but *not as something actually enjoyed* – as a *dream, an 'ideal'* or an *'idea'* not yet realized. Nothing is known of freedom, in the first place, except the 'idea'. *Erst kommt die Idee*, and the enjoyment of freedom is thought to necessitate the *translation of the idea into practice*.

In this manner of thinking, then, it will seem appropriate to analyse the 'idea of Freedom', and to get it clear and unmistakable, before the attempt is made to translate it into forms of concrete behaviour. Consequently, it seems that the first question to be answered is the difficult question: *What is Freedom?*

> Freedom keeps Europeans in unrest and movement. They wish to have freedom, and at the same time they know they have not got it. They know also that Freedom belongs to man as a human right. What, then, is Freedom?
>
> Jaspers.

(iii) Now, the analysis of the idea of Freedom leads to the *recognition of certain forms of behaviour as the embodiments of the* *idea of freedom* and as consequently desirable. These forms of behaviour are thought of as *expressions of the idea of Freedom*: e.g. Freedom of Religious belief and observance, freedom of speech, freedom of Assembly and Association, political freedom, social freedom etc. And, since these are still only *dreams*, the mind may run on to more and more extended expressions of the idea of Freedom – Freedom from *Fear* and Freedom from *Want*: there is no limit in imagination short of the complete realization of the idea of freedom.

From the analysis of the idea, then, springs a comprehensive statement of the forms of freedom, which in turn may be used as the contents of a *Bill of Rights* – that is a statement of claims to freedom demanding authorization by the established powers. And, in this way of thinking, the Bill of Rights will appear as *the embodiment of the images of a dream in a coherent scheme of propositions and principles*.

(iv) But a Bill of Rights by itself, though it defines the character and proportion of the exercise of Freedom in the mixture, does not establish that proportion. What is required is a *method of securing what has been defined*. And, in this way of thinking about it, the next step is to *devise expedients for establishing* and securing the Rights which have been recognized as composing the desired exercise of freedom. These expedients will, of course, be concerned to reduce at all points the element of submission to power in the mixture which composes the projected way of living. And naturally the most important of them will be concerned with the greatest and most obvious concentration of power – *the government*. These expedients will often reveal themselves as constitutional devices for *breaking up the solid concentration of power represented in government*. Among these expedients, for example, may be the device of *Representative Government* (in which the exercise of power is controlled by an exercise of freedom.) And another may be the device of *separating the powers of government* – the provision that government itself shall be penetrated by the exercise of freedom in its parts – *the judiciary, for example, being given the independence* necessary in order that it may protect the agreed limits of the exercise of power by the legislature and the executive.

In short, the Bill of Rights will be recognized as an act of government, an exercise of power, injecting an element of freedom into a manner of human intercourse which hitherto was composed almost exclusively of the exercise of and submission to power. Freedom, that is, appears concretely as a concession made by the established powers.

(v) All this composes a coherent manner of thinking about the relation of the two elements of human intercourse. It is a manner of thinking which makes great use of the word 'Freedom'. It begins with an abstract idea and ends with a Bill of Rights in which a list of freedoms is formulated and devices for securing these freedoms. The exercise of freedom is here recognized as proceeding from principles laid down in constitutional documents.

Now this manner of thinking is, in many respects, peculiarly modern: perhaps because, as Mme de Staël said of France – 'Freedom is ancient, despotism is modern.' Its appearance cannot with confidence be dated earlier than the seventeenth century. It is best exemplified in the American Declaration of Independence and in the French Declaration of the Rights of Man. It springs from an overwhelming experience of submission to power. And its programme is the institution of expressly formulated 'freedoms', each of which is known as a contribution to the realization of a general idea of Freedom. I am not concerned with the virtues and vices of this manner of thinking: it is important because it is a tremendously influential current manner of thinking. It is the way of thinking which gives their peculiar meaning to the words *'liberté'* and *'freiheit'* – and perhaps also to the word *'libertas'*.

6. (i) We may turn now to the other manner of thinking about the relation between the exercise of freedom and the submission to power. This begins, *not with the overwhelming experience of submission*, but with the *experience of a pattern of social life in which the exercise of freedom is a recognizable and independent element*. That is, the exercise of freedom does *not* appear as *a concession won from power*, but as *an original ingredient* in social intercourse. Freedom does not have to be dreamed, or invented by contemplating an 'idea', because it is already in some respects enjoyed. Consequently, this manner of thinking about the exercise of freedom does not begin with an ideal or a general idea of freedom to be subsequently realized, but with a number of current forms of behaviour recognized as *'liberties'*. And these 'liberties' are not known as the self-denying gifts of a supreme power, but as primor-

dial elements in the pattern of social life. They are, no doubt, enjoyed by only a few, and appear as *exemptions or privileges*, not shared by all the members of the community. But they constitute not expressions of an abstract idea, but a concrete model for the exercise of freedom which is capable of being copied and extended. It is 'liberties' of this sort which appear, for example, in *Magna Charta. Magna Charta* is a 'charter of liberties'. But it is not a Bill of Rights. It is a *record of specific liberties* already enjoyed, *not* a *statement of claims requiring authorization by a supreme power*.

(ii) Secondly, in this way of thinking, government does not appear as a concentration of power which should be broken up in the interests of the exercise of liberty, but as a partnership in which the exercise of liberty is already represented: government is seen *to involve the cooperation of independent sources of power*.

Special circumstances, no doubt, are necessary to make possible this way of thinking, but they are not very rare circumstances in European history. A society which (like most European societies in the middle Ages) is aware of possessing *consuetudines* which are *not the creation of legislative power*, but are an independent invitation to submission, may recognize in this partnership of powers, not an invented device for limiting governmental power, but a complex method of government in which the exercise of freedom is already present. *There is no original absolutism to overcome*.

(iii) Thirdly, in this way of thinking, a man will believe himself to enjoy freedom, not when he is assured of it by a Bill of Rights, but when he has *known and easily operated remedies for every infringement of his already recognized rights*. That is to say, this manner of thinking finds no particular magic in the word 'freedom', and is, indeed, without any general idea of freedom at all. Freedom here consists in being protected by known methods against certain invitations to submit to power.

(iv) Now, this second manner of thinking about freedom is perhaps more obscure and complicated than the first, and in order to put it before you clearly I will illustrate it. It is, I think, what may be called the native English manner of thinking – not, of course, exclusive to the English people, but perhaps more fully developed among us than elsewhere. It is the manner of thinking which gives its peculiar meaning to the English word 'freedom', distinguishing it from the Latin *'libertas'*, the French *'liberté'* and the German *'freiheit.'*

English freedom does *not rest upon a Bill of Rights*, setting out and authorizing the mutual extents of the exercise of freedom and submission to power. Indeed, it is very seldom that the word 'freedom' is mentioned in English constitutional documents. Freedom of worship, freedom of discussion and publication, freedom of Assembly and Association – all of which are in some sense and in some degree parts of the pattern of English behaviour – *do not appear anywhere in the Statute Book*, and they *do not appear among the maxims of the Common Law*. There is, for example, nowhere stated in any constitutional document (except perhaps in *Magna Charta*) the principle that *no man can be made to suffer except for a breach of the law, legally established in an ordinary court*. The *Habeas Corpus Act*, which we regard as one of the corner-stones of our freedom, declares no principle and defines no right, it merely establishes a procedure. What we recognize as our freedom exists, first, because and in so far as the courts of law have, at one time or another, decided that certain forms of behaviour are lawful and have the protection of law. All the Englishman's so-called 'liberties' are based upon decisions pronounced by judges in dealing with individual cases. There is, for example, no law against slavery; slavery was never abolished or statutorily declared illegal; there is merely the pronouncement of a judge in 1762, setting free a negro in England, that there was no legal way of holding a man in slavery in England. The English manner of thinking about freedom is rooted in the existence of a Common Law which is recognized as an invitation to submission not itself in the control of other sources of power in the society.

And our freedom depends, secondly, upon there being established and known procedures by which a man can get redress if any of his recognized rights are infringed. For example, a man cannot be made to suffer except for a breach of the law, legally proved, not because this is anywhere laid down as a principle, but because if he is in danger of such suffering or has suffered in this manner he has a remedy – he may invoke the procedure of Habeas Corpus, he may bring an action for damages for wrongful imprisonment, or he may bring an action for damages for assault. His freedom, at this point, consists in the availability of these remedies. And again, the Freedom of the Press for us means no more and no less than that there is no known and legal way of preventing a journalist reporting what happens so long as his report does not infringe certain other recognized rights.

Further, there is in England no special provision for the exercise of freedom in relation to the powers of government. The insistence is always, not on a defined freedom, but on the presence or absence of a procedure. The existence of a procedure for redress is the basis of the positive exercise of freedom. And the absence of a procedure – the fact that there is no known and legal manner of exercising power in certain directions – is the basis of the limitation of the invitation to submit to governmental power.

The history of English freedom, then, is not the history of the realization of an abstract idea, but (1) the history of the establishment of procedures which enable men to enjoy their recognized rights, and the absence or abolition of procedures (like the procedure of arrest on a general warrant) which seemed to give too great power to government. And it is this which makes us peculiarly, almost unreasonably, sensitive to the introduction of new procedures or the enlargement of old procedures which seem to increase the power of government.

(2) the history of the transformation of the 'liberties' of mediaeval society – which were the privileges of the few – into the freedoms of modern England. It was not in an abstract idea or in a dream, but in the privileges of the few that English freedom was born.

7. We have, then, before us two diverse and current manners of thinking about the relations between the exercise of freedom and submission to power. Each manner has its own virtues and vices. Neither is to be counted universally the best manner of thinking.

Every society, I believe, has its own manner of thinking about these things, a manner which springs from its own native experience. And I think the best a society can do for itself is to exploit its own manner of thinking and get as much out of it as it can. In order to do this, it is useful to be clear about the exact nature of its manner of thinking. And I have put before you what I believe to be the two great contrasting manners of thinking towards one or other of which the thinking of most European societies approximates. But it should be observed that what I have been discussing are manners of thinking about freedom; not conclusions about the desirable relative proportions of freedom and submission to power.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[1] LSE 1/1/56. Autograph.

Fifteen

Conduct and Ideology in Politics

1. I want to consider two notorious and related features of current politics:

(1) their propensity to involve us in a certain sort of enquiry

(2) their propensity to involve us in a certain sort of dilemma

(1) First, for many of us politics have become an activity in which we often believe ourselves to be unable to make decisions until we have found the answer to such questions as: What is liberty? What is justice? What is Democracy? or Socialism? or Liberalism? or Communism? etc. That is to say, we find ourselves equipped with a supply of words, most of them abstract nouns, and we want to discover their meaning.

And the reason why we need to know their meaning is that we are often disposed to formulate our political desires and projects in such terms as: 'I want to do *the democratic thing*'; or 'the *Communist thing*'; or 'I think we ought to establish *social justice*.' And, plausibly, we think we can't do that without knowing what it is. It sometimes happens that even political parties are divided and inhibited from action because of a doubt about what one of these words means, or a dispute about its meaning. And, alternatively, we feel well equipped and ready to make decisions when we are clear and confident about the meanings of these words.

In short, our politics have become what we call 'ideological' politics.

(2) Secondly, besides involving us in this sort of enquiry, this situation is apt to generate a certain kind of intellectual dilemma: we sometimes find what we believe to be the principles of our favoured ideology pulling us in one direction

and what may be called our practical judgment pulling us in another direction. We think we know what we ought to do, but it sometimes doesn't seem sensible.

e.g. (a) The 'Liberal' holds that people should be allowed to think and speak according to their beliefs. He has a horror of censorship of any kind, and he is exceedingly sensitive to the least appearance of the suppression of opinion. And yet occasions arise when his practical judgment tells him that what is being said is too dangerous to be tolerated. And he finds himself disposed to compromise with his liberal principles: but he is unhappy, he feels guilty, he looks to himself like a traitor.

(b) The 'democrat' holds, perhaps, that public policy should be in the control of popular opinion; but there may come occasions when he recognizes that this control would be disastrous. And yet he feels like a turn-coat. He has no confidence in a departure from his principle; but he doesn't honestly know how to avoid such a departure.

(c) The 'Socialist', having, perhaps, determined that Socialism stands for 'Equality', may nevertheless see that to establish equality in a certain respect will have consequences which he would prefer to avoid – although they are not demonstrably consequences which a socialist should avoid. But if he comes down on the side of compromise he is unhappy.

Now, we may be told that situations of this sort are not at all remarkable. A conflict between principles and practice is only to be expected; principles always need adjustment to practice. And the process of adjustment is so well-known that it has been given a name: it is called 'casuistry.' First state your general principle and then observe the occasions when compromise is justifiable.

Here is an example; it appears in almost every seventeenth century book on moral conduct.

> General principle: One ought always to return something borrowed when the owner asks for it.
>
> Exception: I have borrowed a sword. The owner comes for it in a state of passionate anger and demands the return of the sword with the clear intention of killing a third person. In these circumstances I should refuse to return it, but wait for a more suitable time to give it back.

You will, however, observe two things about this situation.

(1) The ground upon which I am absolved from following the general principle is another, and allegedly higher, general principle: the duty of preventing murder. This is a case of principle against principle.

(2) The move from one principle to another is not a compromise, and consequently it is not apt to leave behind any feeling of guilt: I can be confident I have done the right thing. Moreover, the general principle I have followed is *not only higher* than the one I have not followed, but is a *principle that belongs to the same range of ideas*: it is as if a 'democrat' in a dilemma were appealing from one 'democratic' principle to another equally 'democratic' principle.

But the tensions I am considering, between ideological principle and practical judgment in current politics, are not of this sort; or, at least, they are not all of this sort. The occasions I am thinking of are when we find ourselves disposed to depart from principle not in pursuance of another higher principle, but merely because it seems that circumstances require compromise;[1] or (alternatively) they are occasions when we find ourselves disposed to depart from one principle and be guided by another principle which belongs to a wholly different range of ideas. And on these occasions we are apt to be left with a feeling of guilt and discomfort. Whatever we do, we find it impossible entirely to reassure ourselves that we have done the right thing.

Now, if the person who finds himself in this kind of situation is a weak character, he will be disposed to blame circumstances for having imposed the dilemma upon him: the world ought to be such that I can be a 'democrat' or a 'liberal' in it without this sort of anxiety. The world, for example, ought to be of such a character that disarmament leads to peace and not to war. But if he is a sensitive and thoughtful character he will not only feel frustrated and unhappy, but he will begin to think that maybe he has misunderstood his principles and that he ought to engage once more upon the enquiry into their meaning, and he may become what in ideological politics is known as a 'revisionist': for a 'revisionist' is the counterpart of the ideologue in politics.

In short, ideological politics not only necessarily begins with an enquiry into the meaning of the words which express the principles to be followed, but also the conduct of ideological politics is apt to bring us up against situations which seem to call upon us perpetually to renew this enquiry as the only intelligent and honest way of resolving the dilemmas it is apt to impose upon us.

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[1] Oakeshott's marginal note: 'cp. Wollheim on Equality – *Encounter*.'

2. Now, this is a style of politics we are all familiar with. What are its presuppositions?

Politics could assume this character only if –

(1) We have ideological principles
(2) We understand these principles in a certain manner.

(1) The first condition I take for granted. We *do* have political principles, we *are* accustomed to express them in abstract nouns like 'justice', 'liberty', 'democracy', 'liberalism', and there is no reason why we should not. But simply to have principles, even if they are expressed in these difficult abstract nouns, could not itself generate a style of politics in which we are always being urged to engage in an enquiry into the meanings of the words we use, and in which we are apt to find ourselves involved in tensions and dilemmas of the sort I have noticed.

(2) As I see it, what provokes this kind of enquiry, and this sort of tension between principles and practical judgment, is the manner in which we are apt to understand the words we use and the principles they stand for. In short, ideological politics is not simply politics of principle as against politics of expediency, but is a style of politics which springs from attributing to principles a certain character.

3. The presupposition in this style of politics is that words like 'justice', 'liberty', 'democracy', 'socialism' and so on are words like 'table', or 'space-ship'; and that words like 'table' and 'space-ship' refer to simple or complex objects or features of the world, either present or in the future. We assume that these words have fixed meanings which can be discovered by a certain sort of enquiry. And when we ask, 'What is justice?', or 'What is democracy', 'What is Equality'? (as we are urged to do in this style of politics) we think of ourselves as embarking upon an enquiry which will lead to the identification of the object or features or condition of the world

which corresponds to the word 'justice' or 'democracy' or 'equality'.

Now, what sort of enquiry will this be? We begin with a concept, we believe it to refer to an object, and we want to identify the object it refers to. We begin, for example, with the notion of 'natural rights', we assume that this is an expression which refers to an object or objects, and we want to discover what in fact our 'natural rights' are.

It will be an enquiry of a familiar sort – the sort, for example, conducted by a detective who has a murdered body on his hands and wants to find out who did it. It will be like the enquiry we institute when we have before us a book which is without an author's name on the title page and we want to discover who wrote it: for we know already that somebody must have written it. Or again, it will be like the enquiry we should make in order to find out the parents of a strange child who had been deposited on our door-step. Just as, because it is a child we know it must have parents, so because we have these notions 'democracy', 'liberty' etc. we assume that they must have something to correspond to them in the real world, if not now, then in the future, and we want to identify this correspondent.

Again (quite consistently, if this is our attitude) when we hear people using words like 'liberty' or 'democracy' with different meanings, we assume that the reason for this must be that somebody has not taken enough trouble to find out their *real* meanings – that is to say, to identify the object they refer to. It never occurs to us that this variety of use may spring from there not being any such object, and that these words are of a different sort from words that refer to objects.

And further, (again consistently), when we use these words as expressions of criticism – when we say '*That* is not democracy' or '*That* is not real freedom' – we think of ourselves as comparing a current or suggested condition of things with the ideal condition of things which the word properly stands for, and finding a discrepancy.

And when we are baulked in an enquiry of this sort, when we find difficulty in agreeing upon the identity of the object, we don't wonder whether perhaps the enquiry is misconceived, we only think we haven't gone far enough with it.

4. Or the situation may be seen from the other point of view. In order that our ideological principles should be able to con-

flict with our practical judgment and at the same time retain such a hold over us that we feel guilty when we abandon them, we must be understanding them as guides to conduct which, for some unaccountable reason, on occasion fail to guide us. We are thinking of these principles as oracles which ought to tell us what to do, which ought to enable us to triumph over circumstances. And, indeed, we often appeal to them in order to explain our conduct; we say: 'I am proposing this course of conduct *because* I am a liberal.' Being a 'liberal' means believing in an ideal object called 'liberalism', and we think that if there were no such object we shouldn't know how to act or what reasons to give for our actions.

In short, we are thinking of our principles as representing specific conditions of things, and we are unhappy when we depart from them because departure seems to be a process of subtracting from them, of modifying or qualifying the specific condition of things to which we have given our allegiance. First the 'idea' – 'democracy', 'liberty' etc. – and then, sometimes, an unhappy qualification of the 'idea.' We spend endless trouble defining the 'idea' – that is, seeking the object the word corresponds to; but at critical moments allegiance to this object fails to guide us.

5. Now, my own belief is that our common failure to bring this sort of enquiry to a satisfactory conclusion, our failure to identify the object, and the propensity of ideological principles to fail us at critical moments, is because it is a misconceived enquiry and because we have mistaken the nature of these principles. Words like 'liberty', 'justice', 'democracy' are not words of this sort, namely, words which have fixed meanings and correspond to specific present or ideal objects. I believe that if we recognized what sort of words these really are, we might still retain our principles but we should not mistake them for guides to conduct and would thus avoid the dilemmas which appear when they seem to be incapable of guiding us. And I think that what misdirects us and puts us on to making the wrong sort of enquiry is our propensity to use these abstract nouns; we should be much less prone to mistake if we thought in terms of the corresponding adjectives, and asked ourselves what nouns it is appropriate to qualify by these adjectives.

As I understand it, in politics, as in everything else, – in astronomy, in business and in moral life – we do not begin with an abstract idea but with an activity. We do not begin with the idea of 'astronomy', or 'honesty' or 'justice', and then try to find out what object or condition of things is referred to in this 'idea' and then set about pursuing it, because in fact we can't begin in this manner. Instead, what we do is to give way to an impulse to take a certain direction in activity, not knowing at all where it is leading us, and without the necessity of supposing that it is leading us to any specific condition of things. Nobody could know, *a priori*, or by any amount of enquiry, what 'astronomy' is, or what 'justice' is; each of these is an activity – the activity of an astronomer or the activity of a high-court judge – not an 'object' to be understood and achieved.

But, in the course of these and other activities, principles are apt to emerge. Reflecting upon the general direction being pursued, we formulate some general principles which seem to characterise the point we have reached. The further step of supposing these principles to refer to objects is simply a mistake. The liberal 'principle' of tolerance, for example, emerged from a disposition to put up with other people and to think it right to do so; but there is no such 'thing' as 'toleration'. And if we are disposed to put up with other people we never imagine that we ought to put up with *everything* they do: that's the sort of thing we begin to imagine when we begin to speak of 'toleration.' Nobody could begin as a 'Liberal' or a 'Democrat'; these are dispositions one can acquire; but there is no such thing as 'liberalism'. In short, a propensity to behave in certain manners may turn into a specific manner of behaving, defined in terms of general principles. But these general principles are merely short-hand expressions of what we know to be exceedingly intricate manners of behaviour, never fixed or finished, and are not the features of an ideal object about which it is sensible to ask the question, What is it?

Consider, for example, the activities of

> dealing out justice
> managing a public meeting
> being a King

Each of these activities has now, with us, come to be expressible in terms of general propositions. But it would be a great mistake to suppose that justice had never been dealt out, public meetings managed or men held the office of King, before these principles had been formulated, or that these propositions are anything but abstract, short-hand statements of very complicated manners of behaviour which are, in fact, never fixed or finished.

6. Let us consider the administration of justice. This certainly did not begin by somebody finding an answer to the question: What is justice?, that is to say discovering the object or condition of things to which the word 'justice' corresponds. In the beginning was, not 'the idea' but 'the case'. Dealing out justice begins not with an 'idea' of justice, but with devising remedies for wrongs and procedures for courts. It did not begin with people having *rights*, but with people having remedies, recognized courses of action. And it was by a process of abstraction and projection that 'rights' emerged out of remedies, and duties out of writs. We think of Habeas Corpus as one of the corner-stones of our 'freedom'; but it says nothing about 'freedom' – it is a writ, a means of obtaining a remedy for a specific wrong.

But when, after a long time, people began to formulate the general principles of dealing out justice – principles about evidence, for example, principles about what are and what are not 'good' contracts, and so on – a new situation appears. But from the manner of their construction it is clear that these principles are not the components of an ideal situation called 'justice', and that they cannot be expected to provide an infallible guide to conduct. They do not define an object, they do not tell us how cases should be decided; they tell us merely how they should be thought about.

7. Now, what I want to suggest is that our political principles have emerged in the same way as these principles of jurisprudence, and are similar in character. Each so-called political ideology represents a propensity to behave in a certain manner; it doesn't refer to an ideal object: it cannot be expected to tell us what to do; it tells us only how we may profitably think about our problems.

Words like 'Democracy', 'Liberalism' etc. are like the words we use to distinguish so-called 'styles' in architecture. They are abstract statements of characteristics observed in conduct. First came the builders, and the styles ('paladian', 'gothic', 'baroque' etc.) are the results of contemplating the products of builders and of discerning in them general principles. But if we then turn round and say, 'I propose to build in the gothic style', we are doing something which, in architecture, we know leads to unfortunate results: to shams and monstrosities. For we are taking as a guide to activity what in fact cannot perform the office of guide – something that was intended only to indicate how we should think about certain buildings which were never, in fact, put up 'in this "style"'.[2]

Consider the 'Liberal' principle of 'freedom of thought and speech'. Is this a 'principle' which, if circumstances oblige us to compromise with it, we ought to feel somehow guilty? Not at all. It represents, in short-hand, a disposition and a specific range of remedies available to us. It is not, by itself, a *right*, or even a possible right. If we begin with it as a 'principle', and think of it as an expression which refers to a specific condition of things, we shall find ourselves obliged to regard the remedies for slander and libel as unfortunate subtractions from it, and we may feel unhappy about them. But this tension disappears, if we understand 'principle', not as a description of a specific condition of things to which we should aspire, not as a guide to conduct, but as a short-hand expression for a disposition.

Or again, 'democracy' appears, from the way we are apt to use the expression, as an object about which it is sensible to ask, What is it? an object or condition of things which democrats (when they have answered the question, What is it?) may properly live in, like a house; or may aspire to or endeavour to make – like a 'space-ship'. But in fact it is nothing of this sort; it is not a word of this kind. If it means anything, it means a set of principles which set out in short-hand certain complicated ways of behaving. It is a word we may find useful for stating some preferences and choices in respect of the activity of governing. And instead of supposing it to refer to some object and therefore suitable to provoke the questions; 'What does it mean? What does it refer to?', we should regard it as a word about which it is appropriate to ask 'How shall I use it?'

8. But if our ideological principles do not refer to objects, if they do not represent a condition of things to which we may properly aspire, if they cannot in this sense be recognized as

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[2] Oakeshott's marginal note: 'feudalism'.

the causes, explanations of guides of conduct – What is their use?

Their use is determined by their character.

(1) First, it seems unavoidable that we should perform these acts of abstraction and projection in which ideologies emerge. We do it in respect of most of our activities, so why should we not do it in respect of politics and morals? But when, for example, we reach the conclusion that the activity of a 'scientist' should be 'objective', that he should not mix his desires with his conclusions, we can recognize this as an exceedingly short-hand expression for a very complicated mental process and, as such, perhaps a useful generalization – without supposing that the principle itself is the scientist's guide to conduct, and without supposing that there is such a thing as 'science' about which it is sensible to ask the question 'What is it?' and of which this principle is an ingredient.

We may assume, then, that in politics, as in every other activity, general principles will be discerned and that they will be apt to find expression in abstract nouns.

(2) They will be useful as indications about how to think about our affairs; they will be useful as *memoranda*, reminders of the dispositions we should bring to the conduct of affairs; and they will be useful as rough tests of achievement – not like ideal objects upon which we should model our conduct, but like pieces of litmus paper which answer only the simplest question; acid or alkali? And if they are used in this way they will not present us with unhappy, and (as I believe) counterfeit dilemmas.

It has been said that having become ideologues in politics we can't go back to an unreflecting, naïve style of politics. But this, I think, misrepresents our situation as a choice between a present sophistication and a lost (and not to be recovered) *naïveté*. Our real choice is between two different ways of understanding and using general principles in political activity.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[1] LSE 1/1/30. Typescript with autograph corrections. The reference in note 2 to Wollheim, equality and *Encounter* suggests this paper was written after 1955, when Wollheim began publishing *Encounter*. Wollheim also published an article entitled 'Equality' in 1955, but elsewhere: see *Proceedings of the Aristotelean Society*, 56 (1955–6), 281–300.

Sixteen

The Idea of 'Character' in the Interpretation of Modern Politics

1

We have learned to be suspicious of the word 'character' because it has so often been used in a manner that implies, or seems to imply, beliefs that we would like to avoid – the belief, for example, in real essences. Like the word Φῦσρις in the writings of some of the Greek historians and philosophers, 'character' has been used to denote the real entity or 'cause' in virtue of which things are what they are and behave as they do.

Nevertheless, although this is an unfortunate use of the word, it would be a pity if the mistaken beliefs and theories often connected with it were to lead to its exclusion from our vocabulary; even from our scientific vocabulary. For, in my opinion, it is a word we cannot very well do without. And, without involving ourselves in these questionable beliefs and theories, we are accustomed to use it in order to make intelligible the conduct of ourselves and of others. If we never discerned dispositions as well as observed actions, and if we never detected the 'character' which these dispositions compose, we should know very little about ourselves or other people, and we should find it difficult to formulate expectations about the conduct of either. Indeed, in common use, the word 'character' denotes, not 'cause' or 'essence', but the balance of a man's dispositions. We may discern this when we have the opportunity of observing and reflecting upon his conduct in a variety of situations; and it is revealed chiefly (though not exclusively) in the recurrence of certain sorts of conduct and utterance. He will not always act 'in character'; that is to say there may be occasions when the balance of his dispositions is upset. But 'knowing his character' is having beliefs about his dispositions, and expectations about his conduct that are often fulfilled. These expectations may relate to specific actions; we may be able to forecast what a man will do in certain circumstances, and (without deceiving ourselves) we may recognise a certain action as 'characteristic'. But our expectations will usually be less specific: what we recognise as 'characteristic', and what we expect, is more often conduct that falls within a certain limited range. We may expect a man to act generously rather than stingily without being able to forecast exactly what form his generosity will take; or, more narrowly, we may (for example) expect a man to act generously except where money is involved. Of course there will be trivial actions which, however often they are repeated, give little insight into the balance of his dispositions; and actions that represent choice, rather than mere habit, are likely to give most information about important dispositions. A man is said to have a 'firm' character when the balance of his dispositions is rarely upset; and a 'weak' character denotes an uncertain balance of dispositions exhibited in conduct which is often unpredictable, even in its range, let alone in individual actions.

Now, 'character' appears when we recognize a distinction between two different levels of activity. The first, I shall call 'secular' activity; the second, 'diurnal'. By 'secular' activity I mean activity considered in respect of the new situations it opens up; every action being recognised as creating a new situation by modifying an old. By 'diurnal' activity I mean activity considered in respect of its internal structure; every action being recognised as the emblem of known propensities. And the concept 'character' relates to 'diurnal' activity.

In a general way, these two levels of activity or movement are exemplified in the procession of the equinoxes, and the diurnal movement of the heavenly bodies; in the secular movement of the sea in relation to the land, and the ebb and flow of tides. But since we are considering human activity, more relevant illustrations may be found in the inventive activity in which a new machine is designed and put in use, and the daily operation of the machine; in the formulation of a scientific hypothesis, and its exploitation; in the breaking down of an old and the establishment of a new convention in poetic or musical composition, and the activity of composing within the limits of that convention; in modifying or establishing a 'practice', and in following a 'practice'; in the seasonal fluctuation of the price of a commodity, and a sustained progressive or regressive movement of price. In short, in 'secular' activity hitherto prevailing boundaries are assaulted and thrown down; in 'diurnal' activity the limits are recognized as the conditions, not the hindrances of activity.

Nevertheless, 'secular' activity is never merely additive; at each step it creates a *continuum* and with it the possibility of 'diurnal' activity. To modify a 'practice' (in the treatment of a disease, for example) is not merely to add a new item; it is to establish a new 'practice' with a coherence of its own. Consequently, at the 'secular' level a new (or partly new) historical *continuum* is opened up and explored; at the 'diurnal' level, an historical *continuum* is accepted and exploited. And I speak of the *continuum* as 'historical' in order to indicate that, in human activity, it is neither necessary nor fortuitous, and that its boundaries, in the last resort, and however firmly fixed they may be for the time, are evanescent, that is, liable to secular modification.

From one point of view – the strictly historical view – all human activity appears as 'secular' movement; every action creates a new situation by modifying an old, and the historian's eye is adjusted to observe precisely this change. But while there are some actions and passages of activity which call attention to themselves as pre-eminently secular movements because of the magnitude of their secular displacements, there are others that provoke a different interest because of the relative insignificance of their secular displacements. What I have called 'diurnal' activity is of this kind; it is activity that is chiefly interesting in respect of its internal structure because its secular displacement is negligible. For example, if a composer produces a piece of work which, because it breaks no new ground, displays no new powers or dispositions and intimates nothing in store, leaves things very much as they were (although, of course, it may still be a work of great charm and beauty), we are provoked to look round about, rather than before and after, and we understand the work in terms of the dispositions and powers the composer has already disclosed, recognizing it, for instance, as 'a characteristic production of his middle period'. And this phrase itself alludes to the distinction between 'secular' and 'diurnal' activity: the 'period' is a *continuum* established in 'secular' activity; and movement up and down within this 'period', 'diurnal' activity, establishes and gradually reveals what is said to be 'characteristic.'

Moreover, although diurnal activity often displays or conceals some minimal secular movement, it is possible to find examples of pure diurnal activity where such secular displacement as there may be is not only small, but is itself confined within the accepted *continuum*. For example: suppose a schoolmaster with a certain stock of information about the reign of Henry VII. He goes into class one day to give what he is now accustomed to call 'my lesson on Henry VII'. He has nothing to say that he has not said on many such occasions before; he moves within a wholly familiar world; his activity (though not, of course, that of his pupils) is movement up and down within known limits, the limits of his information, which (although they are neither necessary nor fortuitous) he never in fact exceeds and has neither disposition nor power to exceed. And one such occasion is distinguished from another only in respect of the manner or completeness of his exploitation of the unchanging material at his command. In this case, there can be no more than a quasi-secular movement, displacement being confined within the limits of the activity only as progress in the handling of the invariable stock of familiar material. There may be no such progress; the readiness and completeness with which the material is handled may merely vary from occasion to occasion without showing any even quasi-secular movement. But what is notable in the situation, as in all cases of conspicuous 'diurnal' movement, is not merely that 'secular' movement is absent, but that there is a positive revulsion from it: the activity presses upon its boundaries only to confirm them. And consequently we are provoked to consider it in its own terms rather than in relation to some other possible 'lesson on Henry VII'. It has, so to speak, established its own norm. Of course, whenever (as here) a genuine alternative is known or can be imagined (e.g. a more accurate or informative 'lesson on Henry VII'), it is always possible to consider the adequacy of the performance; but just as, when a man begins to grow old, it becomes less and less relevant to consider what he (having shown promise) might have become, or to compare him to others whom he can no longer be imagined to compete with, so whenever our expectation of 'secular' movement declines, our attention and interest settle more and more decisively upon what continues to be displayed, namely, 'diurnal' movement.

On this view of things, then, what I have called 'diurnal' activity is always present; human activity is always more or less of a 'practice'. It may be overshadowed by conspicuously secular activity, and on these occasions (its limits being indistinct because under revision) it is apt to be irresolute: the appearance of 'character' is hindered. But when secular activity is weak or suspended and diurnal activity is conspicuous, then the concept of 'character', the recognition of conduct in terms of known and established dispositions, is provoked.

This is the way I propose to use the word 'character'. And I wish to explore its usefulness in interpreting political conduct, and in particular political conduct in Europe during about the last four centuries, for that is what I mean by 'modern Europe'. Further, in order to be precise, and at the same time to make a beginning least likely to prejudice the investigation, I propose to understand 'politics' as activity and utterance connected with government and the instruments of government. This activity may, in certain circumstances, appear wherever men are associated together and rulers and subjects are distinguished, but I intend to consider it chiefly in connection with those associations that are called the 'States' of modern Europe.

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Politics, then, is activity; action and utterance, things done and thoughts expressed in connection with governing. And in modern Europe, at least, this activity and utterance has been chiefly in respect of the manner in which governments are constituted and authorized, in respect of what governments do and abstain from doing, and in respect of beliefs about the proper constitution and the proper office of government.

Now, as I understand it, in the late fifteenth century (and in some respects a little earlier) there began slowly to emerge, as a modification of 'mediaeval' manners of thinking about politics, a world of images, beliefs, desires, possibilities, projects, dispositions and expectations relative to government in some important respects different from what had hitherto prevailed. No spectacular event inaugurated this change; indeed, it is doubtful whether anybody before the late sixteenth century noticed what was afoot; for, though it sprang from human activity, it was not the result of human design. But when the vista then being opened up unfolded itself unmistakably, it appeared not only extensive but boundless. However, it was not in fact a world without horizons; and in the course of time they came to be perceived. What was establishing itself was a new *continuum* of political activity. And while the secular movement of modern politics is the establishment and exploration of this world, the diurnal movement is the cultivation of it.

The movement of exploration was rapid. There were some tricky moments, such as the execution of Charles I, and there were some large leaps, like the Statute of Uses (1536); but in a remarkably short period of time, the possibilities of this world were revealed and the manners of governing and of attending to the instruments of government which this world intimated were reconnoitred and mapped. The explorers were soon pressing upon its boundaries. Consequently, it is not surprising that this movement of exploration should have come to attract the greater part of the attention of those who have reflected upon modern European politics. Nevertheless, there is something else to be observed; and as the centuries of modern history succeeded one another, this movement (having reached the frontier) became less and less significant. For by the middle of the seventeenth century the limits of this world had revealed themselves, and such pressure as they have since suffered has served less to shake or to move than to fortify and confirm them. These are the historic boundaries that at once enclose and condition the diurnal movement of modern European politics. And, speaking generally, the political activity of the last four hundred years of European history has taken place within a world of beliefs concerning government which is different from what had previously prevailed and whose boundaries have, during this period, suffered no significant change. That these boundaries are evanescent, nobody can doubt; they are historic, not necessary. But what is important is that they have not in fact changed, and they are now so firmly established that they are unlikely to dissolve, or even to suffer major modification, in the near future. Indeed, since they are the product of human activity, they are vulnerable only to the assault of human activity, and so far from such an assault being in train, it has yet even to be projected. A disposition even to raid these boundaries is absent from modern politics. In short, my contention is that what is conspicuous in modern European politics is 'diurnal', not 'secular' activity. The political activity of the last four centuries has taken place within a world of possibilities now fully disclosed, and consequently may be recognised in terms of known and established dispositions. This is what I mean by the 'character' of modern European politics.

This, of course, is to be understood as an hypothesis about modern European political activity, and consequently it calls for appropriate verification. But, failing that, it will not be out of place to consider its plausibility, its worthwhileness as an hypothesis, and to specify it more exactly. The hypothesis is not that 'secular' movement has been absent from modern politics, but that it is relatively insignificant. If the last three centuries or so were pre-eminent for the invention of new political institutions, if these centuries displayed remarkable change in political habits and dispositions, if the range of meaning of the words of our political vocabulary had notably contracted or expanded, if there had been a proliferation of new political concepts, or if the manners of political argument were now as different from those that had emerged in the seventeenth century as these were from what prevailed in, say, the twelfth century – then it might be thought that this hypothesis was not plausible enough to be worth pursuing. But, as I understand it, these are not the features of modern politics. As I shall point out later, one of the great 'secular' displacements that in my opinion contributed decisively to the creation of the historical *continuum* of modern European politics was the appearance of governments more powerful than those that had hitherto existed. And while there has certainly been a 'secular' growth of power during the modern period, the phenomenon had asserted itself and had been recognized in appropriate beliefs and dispositions as far back as the sixteenth century.

From one point of view, then, the 'character' of modern European politics may be understood as the χαραδρα, the 'groove' or 'channel' into which political activity has settled itself, the walls of which set the limits of currently possible political enterprise and utterance. This 'rut' has, of course, been excavated by human activity: the 'character' is the product of long continued movement which has gradually chiseled out its own restrictions, each absence of deviation contributing to a result which in the course of time discloses itself unmistakably. It represents certain propensities, a certain limited range of choices which have been established in response to conditions which were themselves largely the product of choices.

But, from another point of view, the 'character' of modern European politics may be understood as the modern European political 'character'; that is, the *persona*, or mask, which a member of a modern European community assumes when he is engaging in political activity. This *persona* is the counterpoint of the 'character' of modern European politics: what appears in the one as propensities to move in certain directions, appears in the other as dispositions to think, speak, or act in certain manners. And conducting himself in this manner, expectations come to be entertained with regard to the activities of governing and attending to the instruments of government which serve to engrave this *persona* more deeply. Or, to put the matter in another way, our circumstances (largely our own making) have inspired us to write 'parts' for our politicians, or ourselves as politicians. These 'parts' are susceptible of a limited range of interpretation, in action and utterance. And in so far as they consist of words to be spoken, they make use of a vocabulary we did not invent, but upon whose words our usage has imposed a certain range of meaning.

The character we are considering is, then, an historic character. And in my opinion the manner of thinking which revolves around the concept 'character' is profitable only in so far as it avoids the temptation to press on to more ambitious conclusions about human character in general. The information we are calling upon concerns the modern European political character and authorises no conclusions about anything else. But if this character is not our 'destiny', if it is neither necessary nor permanent, neither is it conspicuously evanescent. It is significant because it is a balance of dispositions in respect of government which, as a matter of fact, has for the time being established itself. It represents, in the manners and enterprises of government, a certain range of movement; among the governed, a certain range of expectation; and for governors and governed alike, a political vocabulary whose words are allowed a certain range of meaning. Nevertheless, it was not first designed, then modelled, and then imposed upon the conduct of European affairs. It has emerged gradually, as a modification of an earlier political character. Consequently, its dispositions were enjoyed as they appeared, and the character itself was but slowly sketched out and even more slowly apprehended. And further, it both emerged and established itself earlier in some localities than in others. That is to say, the character has been on the European scene for something like four centuries, although it has only more recently come to fill the stage.

But if it is significant in the first place because it is now firm and unmistakable, because the dispositions that compose it are fully revealed, it is significant, in the second place, because there is at present no alternative to it. This is the only *persona* available to the politician as he steps upon the European scene. If it were a local character, surrounded by a variety of alternatives any of which might seem more commendable or less obnoxious than our own, or if it were a pre-eminently temporary character with its successor coming to meet us already half over the horizon, then, no doubt, it might remain interesting but it would be relatively insignificant. But, as I understand it, this is not our situation. The character is not conspicuously evanescent, and in Europe there is no alternative to it; that is, there is no other '*character*' present and available to be preferred. The secular movement which created its conditions has long ago been completed in principle, and the parallel movement in which it was diffused over the politics of every European community is now also complete.[1] And the choice before the politician is not whether he shall enjoy this character or another, but whether he shall learn to manage its dispositions appropriately and thus avail himself of the whole range of opportunity it offers, or whether he shall constitute himself a representative of some preferred fragment of it.

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[1] There is some exaggeration here. Spanish politics are somewhat anomalous. Spain is interesting because although the character was emergent there as elsewhere in the sixteenth century, its development was suspended. But I should certainly not regard the politics of Eastern Europe as an exception. And European political dispositions etc. have been diffused outside Europe to such an extent that there is room for doubt whether there is a second political character of any significance now to be found in the world.

One other general feature of this character is worth noticing here: it is a manifold, not a simple character. It does not impose on us a single, unequivocal direction of activity, but a certain range of activity. To engage in politics in modern Europe has, for some centuries, been to be pulled, not in one direction, but in many. This complexity derives, in the first place, from the variety of sources from which the character sprang. But so far from setting it on the road to greater simplicity, the passage of time has added to its complexity. Its emergence was not a process in which the simple took the place of the manifold, and the dream of simplicity which it bred is a comment on the frustrations imposed by an ill-understood complexity rather than a forecast of the way things were going and of what might appear. Nor, in general, is there any puzzle about how this happened. In the modifications that went to compose the new political character, mere destruction played an insignificant part: what was overturned was rarely demolished; the new was grafted on to the old and often depended for its prosperity upon the survival of what it seemed to replace. Here and there, in one department or another, one may perhaps detect a simplifying process at work, but it is not easy to make it convincing. The *persona* of a mediaeval king was notably complex, but although the components have changed a little and changed places a lot, it would be rash to assert that the *persona* of a modern monarch is, either constitutionally or sociologically, less complex than his mediaeval counterpart. Indeed, there is nothing extraordinary in this complexity of political character; it is paralleled in every other aspect of European civilization. Our blood, our languages, our moral ideas, our religious beliefs are each an historic alloy which pull us, not in one direction but in many: there is no European people that does not contain a variety of physical and emotional types, no European beauty that is not of a composite order.

Now, the contention that there is but one modern European political character and that it is composed of multifarious dispositions raises the suspicion that what we are investigating is something so amorphous that the investigation is not worth while. What 'character', it may be asked, can be supposed to include the politics of seventeenth century England, eighteenth century France, nineteenth century Germany and twentieth century Russia? In what *persona* may the conduct of Colbert, De Valera, Pitt and Peter the Great be plausibly incorporated? Only a detailed display of the dispositions of this 'character' can answer these questions; all I can do here is merely to suggest that, in this case, uniformity is not necessarily the enemy of articulation, and that inclusiveness does not necessarily entail indefiniteness.

Within any manifold political character there is, so to speak, room for movement and manoeuvre; circumstances lead to shifts of emphasis in which some dispositions assert themselves at the expense of others, but without destroying the character as a balance of various, not always congruous, dispositions. This was certainly so in the character of the mediaeval monarch. And, like that character, the modern European political character is, not a fortuitous collection, but an historic compound of historically, not logically, related dispositions. In short, a manifold political character is, in this respect, like a mixed farm in which the farmer may adjust the balance of his attention to a changing market, or vary his occupation at choice, without having to branch out in an entirely new direction. Such a character, however, will be exposed to certain extremes, which represent, not impulses entirely foreign to it, but decisive and sustained movement in one of the directions of which it is capable. Normally, the internal movement of a manifold political character does not reach to its extremes; indeed, so far from being attracted to them, it is repelled: each represents a condition of simplicity of which it is capable but which to occupy is nevertheless alien to it. Moreover, these extremes may not only be distant from one another; they may even be opposed to one another, one forbidding all (or most) of what another prescribes, or at least warrants. And these opposed extremes are not disruptive of the character so long as they are mediated to one another by components of the manifold which, though they are not themselves extreme, partake in some degree of the extremities. This, indeed, is a common observation: the diversity of human character, even within a single civilization, is immense, but the extremes (the saint and the profligate, for example) are made intelligibly human to us, not by any self-evidently human qualities, but by the space between being filled, without serious *lacuna*, by characters all of which, in spite of their differences, we have no difficulty in recognising as human. And in this manner we may understand the conduct of, say, a Hitler or a Lord Liverpool as falling within the modern European political *persona*; recognize them as modern European politicians, and neither as gods or devils, nor as political figures from some other era.

Thus, if what we have to consider is a manifold political character, it is not necessarily amorphous or indefinite on account of the diversity of its dispositions. And it would seem that, in order to understand a character of this sort, our first task must be to determine the range of its dispositions by ascertaining the extremes which it is capable of touching. What must be important in any complex character is its specific range, for it is this which, in the first place, distinguishes it from other characters.

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I can best supplement this, so far very general, account of the idea of 'character' and the way in which it may be used to elucidate modern European politics, by showing where my study of it, such as it is, has led me. I do not do this because I have an unshaken confidence in my conclusions, but merely in order to show the kind of results that may be expected from the investigation of this character.

The complex of dispositions in respect of government which I have called the modern European political character was delineated in principle by the middle of the seventeenth century. Since then some fresh themes have been introduced, but they are all unmistakably variations on what by then had made itself clear. There is an interesting early attempt to investigate this character in respect of English politics in the writings of Milton. And the first Marquis of Halifax pursued the same enterprise; for *The Character of a Trimmer* is a character within a character, the dispositions of a character when it has been rescued from the extremes of which it is capable. But the first full-scale investigation was undertaken by Montesquieu: the project of *De l'Esprit des Lois* is nothing less than the project of ascertaining the political character of modern Europe as it had come to establish itself. And to have perceived this character so early in its emergence was a stroke of genius.

Montesquieu's enterprise is interesting on three accounts:

(1) Because he recognized the character (that is, the dispositions displayed in modern politics) as European and not merely local, as historic and not necessary, as evanescent but not conspicuously so.

(2) Because he recognized the character to be manifold and not simple. This observation led him to set about the business of determining its range, determining (that is) its polarity. He understood it to be a character disposed to move between two ideal extremes, which he called *Monarchie* and *République* (or *Démocratie*).[2] And he associated with this character a political vocabulary whose words possessed a certain range of meaning and consequently a potential ambiguity: the word he paid most attention to was, of course, *liberté*.

(3) Because he seems to understand the character solely, or mainly, as a complex of dispositions in respect of the *constitution* of government. But on closer inspection it turns out that he is using words that normally stand for governments *constituted* or authorised in different manners (*Monarchie* and *Démocratie*) to denote governments *active* in different manners, and that his real interest lay in the pursuits of governments and not the constitutions of governments.

I begin with Montesquieu because anyone who undertakes to investigate the modern European political character must recognize him as the first master in this enterprise. But going further I shall venture upon two propositions, which I advance, not because there is space to substantiate them, but to illustrate the kind of conclusions to be expected.

(1) The first is this: that the pre-eminent dispositions of the modern European political character are not in respect of the constitutions of governments, but in respect of the activities or pursuits of governments.

In any but the most rudimental political character dispositions belonging to both these groups may be expected to appear. But the groups should be distinguished from one another for two obvious reasons. First, because they are in fact independent of one another; what we are disposed to believe or approve or expect of the manner in which a government is constituted neither favours nor obstructs any particular belief or expectation in respect of the activities of governments. And secondly, because in any political character these two groups of dispositions are apt to be of unequal importance, and the individuality of a political character lies, in the first place, in the relative importance attributed to each.

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[2] Halifax denoted the poles of his character by the words 'Monarchy' and 'Commonwealth'.

In the political character that flourished before the emergence of that of modern Europe, dispositions in respect of the constitution of governments were, generally speaking, pre-eminent. That is to say, people thought more, and more often, about how a government was constituted and how it ought to be constituted, than about what it did. Nor is it remarkable that this should have been so. Dispositions more frequently called into play may be expected to occupy a more important place in a character than those that are less exercised; the liveliest and most significant spring up where the opportunity for choice is largest. And in those earlier times the pursuits of governments lay very little within the field of choice; they were settled by circumstance and convention. To maintain peace and order, to guard the laws and customs of the association, when necessary to organise defense, when propitious to embark upon conquest, and to deal with social and economic change when they produced an emergency – it was within this narrow round of engagements that the activity of governing was confined, in none very successful, with resources always stretched. These are not the circumstances to breed reflection, debate, experiment or lively dispositions in respect of the pursuits of government. And the main circumstance that prevented the activity of governing being, or being thought proper to be, an activity of enterprise was the conspicuous lack of power to be enterprising. For what a government does, what it is expected to do and even what it is thought proper for it to attempt or to do, are usually conditioned by the resources of power it already commands or plausibly hopes to command; and before the sixteenth century these resources were comparatively slender – insufficient to meet even the modest expectations of subjects, with nothing to spare upon which choice could exercise itself, and giving no intimation of secular increase.

But in modern times, namely, during about the last four hundred years, the power at the disposal of governments has not only steadily increased, each year bringing with it an increment, but it has now reached proportions hitherto unheard of. And of all the multifarious changes that opened up the new political *continuum* of modern Europe, by far the most important is the appearance of governments endowed with such resources of power that the pursuits of government, for the first time, could be thought of in terms of enterprise. Consequently dispositions in respect of the activity of governments came to be pre-eminent in the modern European political character.

This conclusion, namely, that enquiry into the political character of modern Europe is concerned with a character whose chief and controlling dispositions relate to the pursuits of government, is, I think, what the evidence obliges us to believe; but political reflection has been slow to recognise it. The modern history of European politics has commonly been recounted as if its chief significance lay in the modifications that have come about in our practices and thoughts concerning the constitution and authorization of governments; the tensions that have received the most notice are those concerned with the question *who* shall govern and by what instruments, and the modern political character has often been mistaken for one in which this group of dispositions is pre-eminent.

And there are cogent reasons for this mistake. First, dispositions with regard to the constitution of government will never be negligible in any political character, and at the beginning of our period those of the modern European character had still to unfold themselves, and that unfolding was not achieved without extensive debate, confusion, and violence. The change in this respect was superficially large, but it was nothing like so momentous for the European political character as the modifications that sprang from the increased power at the disposal of governments, however constituted; and much of the change in our beliefs about how governments should be constituted is a reflection of change in our beliefs about what governments should do. Secondly, this group of dispositions retained a ficititious pre-eminence because it was commonly believed that the pursuits of governments derive directly (even necessarily) from the constitutions of governments, and consequently what was really a concern with the pursuits of governments was for a long time disguised as a concern with the constitutions of governments. For example, Tom Paine's attachment to a republican form of government sprang from his belief that the activity of a government constituted in this manner would unavoidably be of an order he approved. But in the course of time the belief that constitutions and pursuits are allied, which had the support neither of logic nor of evidence, became less and less plausible. And thirdly, the political vocabulary that modern Europe inherited was largely composed of words which in common use referred to the constitution and authorisation of governments. During the last few centuries these words have acquired meanings in respect of the pursuits of government, but the process has been slow and confused; the earlier uses have remained unrevoked and the changed direction of interest concealed. 'Freedom' and 'Democracy' are now words which, among other meanings, stand for conditions in relation to what governments *do*, but even in the eighteenth century their normal use was confined to conditions in relation to the constitutions of governments (although the additional meanings are beginning to appear in Montesquieu).

My first proposition about the modern European political character is, then, that it is a balance of dispositions in respect of the activities of governments, and that this direction of attention constitutes its chief and distinguishing novelty. But perhaps it would represent my position more exactly if I turned this proposition into a question – If we study political activity and utterance in modern Europe with these dispositions in mind, does it not appear that the pre-eminent dispositions of the modern European political character are those concerned with what governments do and not with how governments are constituted and authorised?

(2) Now, without the investigation being formulated in precisely this manner, modern European political activity has often been considered from the point of view of beliefs about the activities of governments; and those beliefs have been perceived, not only to point in more than one direction but also to range between two specific extremes. Or, in my way of putting it, the modern European political character, from the standpoint of the activities of governments, has been recognised as a manifold character, and attention has been turned to ascertaining the polarity of the character. This polarity, however, has commonly been misspecified. It has

usually been understood in terms of *more* or *less* activity of the same kind, that is, in terms of the quantity and range of the pursuits of governments (e.g. Anarchy and Collectivism).[3] But a closer inspection of the conduct of modern European politics from this point of view, reveals the extremes of the two different *orders* of activity.

My second proposition is, then, that the ebb and flow of the diurnal movement of modern European politics has been between the disposition to regard the proper office of government as engagement in a *first order* activity, and the disposition to regard it as engagement in a *second order* activity. This, again, is a hypothesis to be verified only in a study of the conduct of modern European politics. There is no space to attempt the verification; all I can do is to elucidate the hypothesis.

The distinction I am calling upon here is familiar. It is the distinction between a substantive activity, and an activity which, in relation to substantive activity, is not itself substantive.

Let us suppose that the substantive activity is to teach Latin grammar to a class of small boys. Now, if this is the engagement, the activity of keeping order in the class is not a substantive activity in relation to it; it is a 'neutral', 'second order' activity which (1) may or may not be expressly engaged in, (2) is indifferent to the specific character of the substantive activity (i.e. it would be the same whatever was being taught), and (3) might be completely successful without in any way advancing the enterprise afoot. Or alternatively, if the engagement, the substantive activity, were keeping order in a class of small boys ('I don't care what you do, but for god's sake keep them quiet', says the headmaster), then it *might* be that teaching the class some Latin grammar turned out a good way of keeping it quiet. But even if this were so, the activity of teaching Latin grammar would be a 'second order' activity in relation to the enterprise afoot, which would not be judged successful or unsuccessful in respect of the amount of Latin grammar learned. In relation to the activity of writing a play, the activity of a censor (who pretends to no knowledge about plays and no predilections, and who does not care what is said on the stage so long as his two verbal deletions are observed) is not substantive; but that of a patron or an impresario (who demands a play of a certain length, on a certain theme, portraying certain characters, who are to express certain sentiments or opinions) is substantive. A man who, in debate, rises to a point of order is engaging in a 'second order' activity; his remarks do not concern the subject being debated, and might be equally cogent if some quite different topic were being discussed: he is concerned only with the conditions of debate. The activity of 'tolerating' is indifferent to the substance of what may be said or done and is concerned only to remove hindrances to utterance or action of any kind. Or, lastly, to take an example from politics in the narrow sense: I should regard a government as being engaged in first order activity if it controlled the activity of farming by actually participating in it (so that the farmer was recognized as its agent), directing what should be grown, when, and in what quantities, and perhaps setting up a standard of 'good husbandry' and enforcing it with penalties of eviction even when the farmer was himself the owner. But if a government controlled the activity, not by participating in it, but (for example) by making available a process of redress for a farmer who found his land being contaminated by the negligence of his neighbour, then I should regard it as being engaged in a second order activity in respect of the activity of farming.

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[3] 'All political convictions vary between two extremes which I will call Collectivism and Anarchy', Lowes Dickinson, *A Modern Symposium*, p. 65.

These, then, are examples of what I mean by 'first' and 'second order' activity respectively. And my contention is that, in respect of the activities of governments, the polarity of the modern European political character is between the disposition to regard the proper office of government as a 'first order' activity in relation to all activities of its subjects and the disposition to regard it as a 'second order' activity.

In a primitive community, governing (if such an activity can be distinguished) is normally understood as a 'first order' activity; the public arrangements of the community, its laws (if it has any) and its customs impose substantive actitivities upon its members. The 'order' of the community, imposed or guarded by government, is a substantive order. In modern European communities, there are many relics of this 'primitive first order' government, and they are relics that there is a strong disposition to regard as relics and to resent. But setting these on one side, the specifically modern type of governing as a 'first order' activity springs from the appearance of *governments* endowed with enough power (that is, ability to impose substantive activities on their subjects) to make 'first order' activity possible. That is to say, the disposition in the modern European character to regard 'first order' activity as the proper office of government, and to expect such activity from governments, is a concomitant of governments capable of being active in this manner. But, on the other hand, it is characteristic of the subjects of modern governments to be engaged in multifarious and rapidly changing substantive activities, and to entertain multifarious and rapidly changing beliefs; it is this that distinguishes them from the subjects of hitherto existing governments. And this circumstance is at the root of the other disposition in the modern European political character, the disposition to regard 'second order' activity as the proper office of government. Subjects engaged in a great variety of ever changing activities may be expected to have among their dispositions a resentment of a government that imposes an over-all pattern upon those activities. And the question, Is the proper office of government to engage in a 'first' or a 'second order' activity in relation to the activities of its subjects? is a question that can appear only in the circumstances of the modern world, and it is a question which these circumstances themselves provoke.

It may, however, appear that the dispositions I have attributed to the modern European character are not historic, but 'necessary'. And, if this were true, then my contention that, although there is no visible alternative to it, this is nevertheless an historic character, would fall to the ground. But other characters, with different dispositions, have existed and can be imagined. A political character might have no notable dispositions in respect of the activities of government; and further, if it exhibited such dispositions they might be other than these – they might, for example, be polarized between more and less activity of the same kind. Moreover, a simple political character, whose dispositions pointed in a single unequivocal direction, is also imaginable. The modern European political character is, I believe, more or less unavoidable in the circumstances; but it is not a 'necessary' character.

Now, the evidence to which one may appeal in order to substantiate this hypothesis about the polarity of the modern European character is, of course, what has been said about the activity of governing, how governments have actually behaved, and the range of internal movement that the institutions of government have enjoyed. And it is because this specific polarity – between 'first' and 'second order' activity – seems to me to be displayed both in the extremes of the internal movement of our institutions, and in that of the words in our political vocabulary, that I have ventured to attribute it to the character itself.

For example, in modern Europe a 'popular' or 'representative' assembly of some sort is a universal (or as nearly universal as to make exceptions negligible) partner in the activity of governing. But, considered from the point of view, not of its constitution but of its office, this assembly has become eligible as a partner in either a 'first order' or a 'second order' manner of government. At one extreme its office is understood as that of supplying power to a government which, because it is engaged in a 'first order' activity, needs all the power it can get; at the other, it is understood as supplying the over-sight and criticism appropriate where government, with enough power to engage in 'first order' activity (as all modern governments have), is nevertheless being kept within the bounds of 'second order' activity. And the same, of course, is true of the institution known as the 'political party': the extremes it has shown itself capable of touching are, on the one side, the party as the ultimate contrivance of power, appropriate to 'first order' activity; and on the other, the party understood as a device for the diffusion of power appropriate in 'second order' activity.

Consideration of the polarity of the meanings which have been imposed upon many of the words of our political vocabulary, also, I think, confirms this view of the polarity of our political character. Almost every word offers itself as an example: I will choose two, the words 'Order' and 'Security'. The new European 'order' projected by Hitler was, beyond question, understood as the imposition of a substantive pattern upon the activities of the subjects of the government imposing that 'order'; 'Order' here is a word in a vocabulary of government understood as a 'first order' activity. And yet 'order' remains the word which represents, perhaps more simply and directly than any other, the condition of things appropriate to government as a 'second order' activity: 'mere order' contrasted with substantive control. And, in the same manner, 'security' in our political vocabulary has meanings which range from the 'second order' enterprise of relief from threatened destruction (a 'security' officer who expressly does not take part in the substantive activities which he protects), to the 'first order' enterprise of 'social salvation', where every participant in government is, in this other sense, a 'security' officer. In short, what is significant about the words of our political vocabulary is not their ambiguity, but their specific ambiguity; and this is a reflection of the specific ambivalence of the modern European political character.

4

Primarily, the investigation of the modern European political character must be understood as a piece of self-anatomy. And its results will be an extended political self-knowledge. It consists in asking certain questions about political activity in the modern world. They are not the only questions that can be asked, and the investigation of character, of course, does not supersede all other kinds of political enquiry. When once we have decided that these questions are answerable questions – and most of this paper has been directed to showing that they are – then, whether or not they are useful questions will depend upon the answers they provoke. My own belief is that asking these questions does call to attention some hitherto neglected passages and points of view in the political writing and reflection of the last five centuries, and that it suggests new and interesting alignments in political conflict and controversy. And, unless I am in error, two of the more elementary, but more important, conclusions that rise to the surface are:

(1) That the modern European political character is irretrievably complex. We are accustomed to having put before us a view of modern politics, and particularly of the politics of the last hundred and fifty years, in which political activity is represented as following (no doubt with some set-backs) a single line of advance, a view of the political character of modern Europe as one in which multiplicity of dispositions is gradually being replaced by a single disposition in respect of the activities of governments. And the disposition usually

selected as the emergent single disposition is the belief that the proper office of government is 'first order' activity. This, I think, is an error. In fact, the modern European political character has resisted all attempts to impose simplicity upon it. In its earliest emergence it was a manifold character, and it has remained so; and what even in the sixteenth century might have been guessed to be the range of its internal movement has now established itself unmistakably. Of course, there have been efforts to impose simplicity upon this character, and they are not without significance; but the fact is that the character has remained fundamentally ambivalent.

(2) That the notorious ambiguity of nearly all the important words in our political vocabulary is not a recent corruption of language; is not, indeed, a corruption of language at all. Nor is it a merely general or merely arbitrary equivocation. It is, first, a specific ambiguity: the words in our political vocabulary – words like democracy, freedom, security, rights, peace, war, treason, property, order, reason, justice, etc. – are used with a specific range of meaning. And secondly, this range of meaning and this ambiguity has been current and unchanged for about three hundred years; it is the counterpart of the ambivalence of the modern European political character. Consequently, the notion that we can divest ourselves of this ambiguity without divesting ourselves of this character, is far-fetched.

(3) There is, however, a third point which I cannot forbear to mention, but with the hope that it will not attract undue attention to itself. The investigation of the 'character' of modern European politics is an exercise in self-anatomy, and if it were nothing more it might be expected to yield interesting results. But in my opinion, it may be something more. I think the concepts 'acting in character' and 'acting out of character' are useful when we are considering the wisdom or folly of political conduct. This notion is, of course, to be found in Montesquieu, and Pascal before him (taking his cue from Montaigne) expressed it as follows: *il faut connaître soi-même: quand cela ne servirait pas à trouver le vrai, cela au moins sert à régler sa vie, et il n'y a rien de plus juste.* And I have no quarrel with this formulation except that I believe *le vrai* to be an illusion.

At one level, we normally have little hesitation in recognizing the relevance of this view. Most of the associations of modern Europe have each acquired, by practice, a facility in managing certain kinds of institutions, certain manners of conduct; and an association called upon to be inventive (in the realm of public ownership, for example) will be recognized to display wisdom if the new is approximated to the already familiar. We understand easily enough that to say, 'They do these things better in France', is not strikingly relevant. This sort of 'acting in character', however, does not carry us very far: the 'character' here is local, and since we know how to criticise it, it is not immune from criticism. But, if it is correct that modern European politics has in general acquired a certain range of internal movement (like the compass of a singer's voice, the product at once of natural endowment and training), and that this range has suffered no serious modification during about the last four hundred years, and that there is no sign of significant modification afoot and no alternative range to prefer, then it might seem that we can judge our political conduct only in relation to its success or failure in exploiting its own range of possibilities. And the question is: How are we to manage appropriately and to the best advantage the whole range of the possibilities available to us? or, alternatively, How are we to overcome the impediments of ignorance and prejudice that would confine our political understanding and activity to a compass narrower than that which is in fact available to us? This range of possibilities I have called the 'character' of modern European politics. And what I mean by 'acting in character' is, not preferring this character to another (for that is not open to us at present: there is no other), but preferring the whole to any fragment of it and managing its component dispositions appropriately.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[i] LSE 1/1/35. Typescript with autograph corrections.

Seventeen

Democracy in England

The word 'democracy' comes to us dishevelled and unsteady from so many *liaisons tripotages* that a writer on Democracy in England does well to consider, before he first puts pen to paper, how he proposes to use it. Setting aside its eligibility as a term merely of approval or abuse, and supposing the intention is to refer specifically to government and not to adventure into the wider field of human relations in general, there are two obvious choices before him: to use it either as a shorthand expression for a concrete manner of governing and being governed, or in order to indicate certain characteristics of a manner of governing. And since government may be viewed either in respect of its constitution or in respect of its engagements and activities, it falls also to be considered whether or not a 'democratic' manner of composing a government carries with it certain sorts of engagements for which the same adjective is appropriate.

The opportunity for confusion is large, and escape requires luck as well as cunning. Consequently it is not surprising when even so intelligent and judicious a writer as Mrs Spearman (who is well aware of the difficulties) is found hovering between these choices. On the whole, she decides for 'characteristics'; and having centred her attention on the manner in which a government is collected, she recognizes a House of Commons elected by the uniform and equal votes of all adult subjects as the characteristic most appropriate to be called 'democratic.' This decision will dispose nobody to pick a serious quarrel, but it does not settle all the difficulties. Turned in this direction we may discover 'democracy' being generated, at first unwillingly and later (after 1884) by design in a series of electoral reforms. But what about the concomitants of these changes, are they also 'democratic'? Highly organized political parties; a House of Commons given less to deliberation and more to voting; government more powerful, more active, pledged to specific programmes, occupying an ever larger proportion of parliamentary time and yet more liable (on critical occasions) to be distracted by popular clamour; political issues grossly over-simplified; a slackening regard for the interests of unorganized minorities; the tenderness for individual choice replaced by a collectivist passion for equality; the rule of law invaded by an affection for administrative convenience; a changed attitude to property; a disposition to curtail the powers of the House of Lords – which, if any of these are we to recognize as a 'democratic' manner of composing a government?

And the puzzle is all the more confusing because so many of these, not merely lie to one side of the hopes and intentions of the pioneers of universal suffrage, but are actually opposed to them: nothing can be more certain than that 'democratic' government appeared first as a manner of governing believed to be appropriate to self-reliant subjects, happy to make choices for themselves and in no need of tutelary care. In these circumstances Mrs Spearman is disposed to shift her ground a little, to distinguish among these emergences, to recognize some as genuine entailments ('essential parts') of 'democracy', others as divergencies from an 'original design', and others still as 'dangers' threatening the destruction of a 'democracy' now regarded as a concrete manner of governing.

This is an honest and a commendable move; but perhaps the proper conclusion is that it would have been wiser not to have grouped a study of how we have come to be governed in the manner we are governed and of its propensities and problems (which is Mrs Spearman's real theme) round this ambiguous and unmanageable concept 'democracy'. And yet, in spite of its difficulties, the adventure seems worthwhile; for doing it this way has allowed her to make some distinctions and to note some consequences which might otherwise have remained unobserved. At all events, she has written a book in which reason and enthusiasm, good sense and subtlety are combined in an unusual degree.

She begins with a chapter on the 'old', 'unreformed' constitution. And reading it we are reminded how difficult a starting place this is, how often a misunderstanding of British government in the eighteenth century has been the occasion of misobservation of our current manner of being governed, and how easy this misunderstanding is. Mrs Spearman's essay on the 'old' constitution is lively and well-informed, she makes good use of what recent historians of eighteenth century politics have laid before us, and she paints a coherent picture. If it has a fault, it is too great reliance on the correctness of the theory of the constitution as it appears in the pages of contemporary writers such as Blackstone and Paley. The truth is that these writers were not very good observers; they may even be said to have missed the main point, which is that the House of Commons in their day had ceased to be merely the custodian of the interests of the commonalty, a check (particularly in matters of finance) upon a government which carried on its business elsewhere, and a partner in legislation, and had itself become the arena of government in which crown and lords and commons each had their seats. And the collisions which had earlier taken place outside parliament were now trials of strength within it. This is what the expression 'parliamentary government' was invoked to describe. This is what was so little understood that both the reformers and the opponents of reform in the early nineteenth century supposed themselves to be reforming or resisting the reformation of a mere popular assembly. And it is only when we see them against this background that the significance of the constitutional changes we connect with the growth of democracy in England properly appears: they compose a modification of 'parliamentary government' which is, in fact, a reminiscence of the manner of governing which preceded it.

The nucleus of Mrs Spearman's account of the emergence of 'democracy' in England during the last hundred years is the story of changes in the electoral law which determines how the House of Commons is collected. It is well-informed, reflective and told with energy and grace. It often descends to detail but never loses itself in detail. Novelties are noted, but not exaggerated. The immense difference in style and intention between the movement for reform which resulted in the Act of 1832 and all subsequent electoral legislation is acutely observed. 'Democracy' by design is not forbidden an appearance, but in the main it is recognized to be a by-product of other choices, of circumstance and of chance. She has a good eye for second-order values and for first-remove consequences: the removal by the Parliament Act of the let-out which the Veto of the Lords afforded to a government in difficulty about the implementation of rash promises; the manner in which an efficient civil service generated the notion of government as public administration; and the permanent mark which the contingency of Ireland left upon our political habits. This is not a 'Whiggish' success-story of 'democracy': it is a story in which vicissitudes are recognized as the stuff and not the hindrances of change.

But the theme is not merely electoral change but also its concomitants; and it is in dealing with these that Mrs Spearman shows her judgment. Some – in the main they are those concerned with our parliamentary habits – she recognizes to be genuine consequences of the extension of the franchise; but even these may be regarded as the price we pay for something valuable or as additional benefits, and, on the whole, she believes them to be misfortunes from which we shall do well to explore an escape. But when she turns from parliamentary habits to the activities of governments she properly recognizes that few of the changes there – even the propensity for collectivism – are exclusively attributable to the extension of the franchise. They are the product of war, of prosperity, of depression, of the whole of our complicated fortunes, and not only of those of the last hundred years. Nevertheless, it remains important to notice that in our own generation an enterprise which had engaged a large part of the political sympathies and energies of three generations has been brought to a successful conclusion in the establishment of a universal and uniform franchise; and that the desuetude of electoral reform has left a vacuum likely to attract less manageable projects.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[i] LSE 1/2/1. Autograph. D. Spearman, *Democracy in England*, Rockliff, London, 1957.

Eighteen

Current Ideas about Government

1. Governing is a familiar activity; to be governed is a familiar experience. But, as with so many familiar things, what we *think* about governing and being governed composes a miscellaneous collection of often ill-assorted ideas. Our thoughts are misty reflections of our own experiences and of the ill-remembered experiences of our forefathers. Our image of government is composed of vague ideas and expectations which have acquired an authority over us all the more despotic because we do not know where they have come from. In short, we carry about with us a bag-full of ideas, which we have not ourselves packed, the contents of which we have never properly examined, and from which (from time to time as occasion seems to demand) we extract an item of mental clothing – a collar, or a tie, or pair of boots – and wear it, not because it 'fits' or is in any way 'appropriate', but merely because it is what comes to hand when we rummage among our mental possessions.

Now, I am not going to suggest to you, this evening, that it would be better for us to get rid of this bagful of ideas and expectations and set about acquiring a new outfit. Nor do I propose to up-end this bag and scatter its contents on the floor, making rude remarks about the quality and condition of items which reveal themselves. Even if we have become tired or suspicious of what we possess, there is in fact no place where we could go to purchase an entirely new outfit; and though one might be amusing at the expense of some of the stuff we carry about with us, it would not be a very profitable entertainment. What I propose to do is to unpack this bagful of ideas and expectations with some care (and also with some piety, because they are in fact all that we possess) and to say something about some of its more important items. In short, what I propose to do is to ask you to reflect upon the complicated image which presents itself when we think about the activity of governing and the experience of being governed. My aim is not to persuade you to exchange this image for another and better image, but to persuade you that this image would perhaps be more interesting and more serviceable if we understood it more clearly.

Now, trying to understand our ideas and expectations with regard to government will entail looking at these ideas and expectations more closely than we are accustomed to look at them, and it will entail some enquiry into, not exactly their history, but into the circumstances in which we have come to acquire them. But if I spend some of my time enquiring into the past it will not be because I want to direct your attention away from the present world in which we now live, but only because our present world of ideas is difficult to understand unless we know something about how it was generated.

And, believe me, I am not proposing to be superior about all this. I shall be talking about the odd ideas and expectations with regard to government which I find in myself no less than about what I suppose to be in your heads.

2. Whenever the activity of governing and the experience of being governed has been reflected upon and talked about, two main topics come up for consideration:

(1) Thoughts and expectations about the constitution or composition of governments.
(2) Thoughts and expectations about the engagements or activities of governments.

And it is difficult to see what could be thought or said about government which does not fall under one or other of these heads.

3. I do not want to say very much, on this occasion, about the first of these topics. We all have thoughts and expectations about how a government should be composed and about the source of the authority it exercises. For example, we commonly believe that a government ought to be recognizable as *the* government *of* its subjects. That is to say, a government which is easily recognizable as *foreign* to its subjects – a government composed of 'foreigners' or one carried on in some

place remote from where its subjects live – has come to be regarded as not composed as it ought to be composed.

This belief is reflected in the two most influential current opinions about the composition and authority of governments.

(1) What is called '*Nationalism*': the belief that the world is composed of units of population, of varying sizes, each of which is defined by its common 'nationality' (whatever that may be), and each of which ought to have a government recognizably all its own. How we have come to acquire this belief is not very easy to detect: it has a long and complicated pedigree. And there are a great many circumstances in the world which make it a very implausible belief. I do not mean merely that there are still many parts of the world where units of population of this sort are to be found which do not enjoy a government all their own, but that there are many parts of the world where it is impossible to find such units of population. And I believe that this general opinion about the proper character of governments is a European invention which has been imposed upon the rest of the world where there is often very little to correspond to it. The fact of the matter is, that five or six hundred years ago Western European peoples began to settle down into more or less homogeneous units of population, each occupying a more or less well defined territory, each regarding the others as 'foreigners', and each finding it, first convenient, and then possible, to have a government all its own. And in the course of time it began to be thought first, that it is 'right' that this should be so in Europe, and then that it is 'right' that this should be so all over the world.

(2) The second current opinion about the composition of governments which we find ourselves to hold, pretty generally, is that a government should be collected and composed in such a manner that it 'represents' all the different classes, interests, beliefs, opinions etc. of its subjects. This is sometimes called 'democratic' government, and when this is so, the word 'democracy' is being used to stand for a certain manner of collecting together, or constituting or authorizing a government; and this, perhaps, is the most appropriate way of using this word.

Now, these beliefs are partnered in our minds by others which point in a different direction. For example, the notion of *Federal* government is a denial of the universal propriety of 'nationality' as the principle defining the unit of population which should have a government all its own. And there is the other notable belief that a government ought to be composed of people who possess a certain kind of knowledge, an élite of some sort – that rulers should be 'experts', and not merely representatives of the interests and opinions of their subjects. This, of course, is a notion as old as Plato; but if we look into our minds we shall find it, sometimes hidden away, sometimes not very far below the surface of our thoughts about government.

But perhaps the best way to discover what are our current thoughts about the proper composition of a government is to consider all the thoughts and opinions that have been thrown out in connection with a part of the world for which an attempt is now being made to construct a government – Cyprus. For these thoughts and opinions are not sudden inspirations, descending out of the blue upon those who utter them; each has a long pedigree stretching far into the past. And when we consider them all together we cannot avoid the conclusion that, in regard to this question: What is the proper constitution of a government?, we find ourselves to be in possession of a remarkably miscellaneous collection of ideas. We are, in this matter, not unlike puppets; the movements of our thoughts are operated by strings, but these strings are held in hands far out of sight; and we often do not know why we think what we do think and are hard put-to-it to defend our opinions when they come up against opposing opinions.

4. Now, I do not propose to say anything more about our thoughts and expectations on this question – the composition and authority of a government – because my main topic this evening is our thoughts and expectations on the other great question concerning government – namely, the *office of a government*; *the activities* and *engagements of a government*.

It is only in comparatively recent times that we have been provoked to consider whether a government ought to be doing this or that. For long centuries the activities of governments were settled by custom, and (what is more important) governments normally did not command enough power even to do what it was customary to expect of them; they very rarely had the extra supply of power which would enable them to look, or to go, beyond the activities conventionally expected of them. But two circumstances have brought about a condition in which it makes sense for us to enquire whether a government should be doing this or that.

(1) The governments *we* have to consider are 'sovereign' governments. 'Sovereignty' in this connection denotes a single authority which, on account of its composition, is recognized to be supreme over all other authorities, without superior or partner, and proof against prescription. In virtue of having a 'sovereign' government, an association has complete control over all the rules and arrangements which constitute it. None of these rules is sacrosanct; any of them (and the rights and duties they impose) may be altered or repealed or replaced by others. In other words, where governing is recognized to be a 'sovereign' activity, there is believed to be nothing which a government is legally forbidden to do, and there is no legal redress for the actions and decrees of a government so long as they are done or pronounced or administered in the manner recognized to be constitutional.

(2) The governments *we* have to consider are exceedingly powerful governments. Not only is there nothing that they are *legally forbidden to do*, but they have at their disposal immense resources of power which enables them, if they so wish, to engage in all sorts of activities which were far beyond the means of the less powerful authorities of the past.

In consequence of these circumstances we find among our thoughts about government such questions as: Ought my rulers to be engaging in the activities they are engaging in? or, Why, when it has both the authority and the power to do so, is not my government doing this or that which at present it is neglecting to do? – Questions, that is, which we would never be moved to ask unless we were thinking abut governments recognized to be both 'sovereign' and very powerful. Indeed, I should guess that more of our thoughts to-day are concerned with the activities of governments than with their constitutions.

Very often, these thoughts are concerned with matters of relatively insignificant detail; but they may be perceived to lead back to larger questions of policy and in the end to the largest question of all: the question, *What is the office of government?* We may begin by objecting to the price of bacon being fixed by government, or by wondering why the government does not decree a wages policy, but at the back of our preferences and our expectations there lies hidden some view of the proper office of a government, some view of what the activity of governing ought to be. This is a topic upon which people have reflected wherever there have been governments; and our own thoughts on the matter reflect the relics of past experiences and of beliefs we scarcely recognize when they are brought to the surface.

5. Our habit is to understand the unfamiliar in terms of what is already familiar to us; we resolve mysteries by approximating them to what we understand. For example, European peoples, familiar with pieces of machinery, for a long time tried to resolve the mysteries of the natural world by regarding that world as a machine and by making mechanical models of its movements and operations. And faced with the activity of governing we have tried to understand it by thinking of it as analogous to other activities which we believe ourselves already to understand. This process of seeking an analogy in other activities for the activity of governing has been going on for many centuries; and I want now to consider some of the analogies we have used in this connection, because it is from them that our thoughts about the office of government spring. Many different analogies have been used, up and down the centuries, to explain the activity of governing, and from these I shall choose the four which I think have been most influential; all of them have a place in our current ideas about government.

(1) The analogy of a household or estate management, which in modern times often takes the form of the analogy of the management of an industrial enterprise.
(2) The analogy of military leadership.
(3) The analogy of education, and particularly of moral education.
(4) The analogy of umpirage or arbitration.

6. The analogy of household or estate management is both the oldest and the most long-lived of all the analogies of gov-

ernment. To manage an estate is to have at one's disposal certain limited resources – the natural resources of the estate and the resources of labour provided by the members of the household – and it is to use these resources in order to provide the necessities of life: food, shelter, clothing and such other commodities as belong to the way of life characteristic of the household. Such a household might be self-contained, living directly upon the products of its estate; or it might exchange some of those products with those produced by other, neighbouring estates, and in this manner enjoy a greater variety of goods. And again, the estate might be managed according to methods dictated by ancient custom, and produce, year after year, the same sort of things in an unchanging succession; or, on the other hand, it might be managed on more enterprising lines so as to produce what we would call a rising standard of living for those who depend upon it. But one way or another, there is not much ambiguity about this notion of managing an estate. And it has seemed to many people to offer an appropriate model, or relevant analogy, to the activity of governing. A political society is to be understood not merely to be a union of households, but to be itself a household on a larger scale. Governing is estate management, though the estate is larger; to rule is to take charge of the 'national housekeeping'; governments are concerned, in the first place, with production and distribution, and, in the second place, with protecting the estate from the incursions of enemies. And here, again, the management may be conservative (designed to provide what has always been provided), or it may be enterprising, designed to provide an ever rising standard of living; but, either way, the emblem of the activity of governing is found in household management.

Now, it is interesting to note that, at least on some occasions, Plato in his reflections on government seems to have been satisfied with the appropriateness of this analogy of household management. Government is the emblem of the social nature of man, of the need we have of one another in winning the necessities of life from the resources of the natural world and in propagating the human species. But, on the other hand, Aristotle expressly rejects this analogy as wholly inappropriate. A 'city' – that is, an association enjoying the experience of governing and being governed – he understood to be composed of households, but not itself to be a household; and consequently governing was, for him, something quite different from household management. And it may be said that in this respect Aristotle reflects more accurately how the ancient Athenians were disposed to think about government than Plato. Politics and government were, for them, not activities concerned with necessities and with survival, but were leisure occupations possible only when necessities were already provided for by the household organization.

But this is a digression. The understanding of governing as household management did not come to us from the ancient world; with us, it is a reflection of one of the recognized activities of a mediaeval monarch.

A mediaeval monarch, such as the King of England, was a ruler in his realm. But he was also the manager of his own royal estates; and, in the main, the revenue which supported him as King was derived from the estates he owned. Consequently, to manage an estate was an activity inseparably connected with ruling, not only in the person of the King, but also in the person of his subordinates who were, likewise, holders of estates which they managed as productive enterprises and within which they performed judicial and other functions. That is to say, productive enterprise and governing were linked at every level of the society. Moreover, the approximation of ruling to household management was all the more easy because the officials who were the immediate assistants of the King in the activity of governing were recognized to be members of the royal household itself. Consequently, when a feudal manner of governing – in which ruling and estate management were scarcely distinguishable aspects of a single activity – was giving place (in the sixteenth century) to government recognized as a 'sovereign' activity and conducted outside the royal household, it is not surprising that people should think and speak of England as if it were a single manorial estate – the Manor of England – to be managed by government, and that they should be disposed to think of ruling as an activity of estate management.

And in subsequent centuries three circumstances have kept this understanding of government alive. *First*, the circumstance of *war*, in which (as we know) governments require to take command over the resources of the nation, and in which the activity of ruling is supremely an activity of estate management. *Secondly*, the circumstances of *colonial government* where, in early days, colonies were thought of as additional estates and to govern them was to exploit their resources. And *thirdly*, the belief – which can be seen already appearing in the sixteenth century – that the resources of a land can be more economically and more successfully exploited if the management of them is under the central direction of government – the beginnings, that is to say, of what in our own day has become a commonplace notion, accepted without question by many people.

The understanding, then, of governing as the management of a productive enterprise – the management of an estate – is not a recent appearance. But, of course, as the nature of productive enterprise has changed, this understanding of government has changed also. Factories have taken the place of estates in this analogy of government, and the notion of perpetually increased productivity has taken the place of management designed to serve a more or less static manner of living; and in these circumstances it is not surprising that, for example, Lenin should have understood government under the analogy of factory management, and that others before him should have thought of governing as essentially the 'administration of things' – i.e., the management of the resources of an estate – rather than the ruling of people.

Here, then, is one of our favourite analogies for the activity of governing, and these are some of the circumstances in which it has commended itself to us and has taken hold of us. To have observed its pedigree says nothing, of course, about its appropriateness, but it does to some extent account for its present appearance and may help us to understand its character and entailments.

7. The understanding of government on the analogy of military leadership is so obvious and so deep-rooted that it requires little comment. There have been groups – like the *comitatus* in which the Teutonic and Slavonic peoples invaded the Roman Empire – in which the activity of the ruler as military commander overshadowed all other activities: communities understood to be composed of a military leader and his followers. And all societies, at one time or another in their history, have engaged in war; and when war

has been sufficiently engrossing, or has gone on for a long time, a society is apt to approximate to an army and government to military command. There is, then, nothing surprising in the appearance of this understanding of government. But what is interesting is its entailments – the sort of activity it attributes to rulers and the sort of character it attributes to the subjects of government.

Government understood on this analogy is recognized as an activity of 'leadership' in which all the resources in men and materials of a community are mobilized and organized for the achievement of a known and limited end, namely, 'victory'. In this respect, this understanding of a government is both like and unlike the understanding of government on the analogy of estate management: the end here is a temporary and limited objective, whereas in estate management it is a continuing purpose – maximum productivity, for example; but, on the other hand, there is a single and precise end in view to which all activity is absolutely subordinated. And governing on the analogy of military command is plausible only in a durable association when a series of objectives is aimed at – e.g. a series of Five Year Plans – the achievement of each objective being plausibly represented as the counterpart of 'victory' in war. Where governing is understood on the analogy of military command and where there is in fact no war being waged, it falls to the rulers to determine what objective shall be pursued. And having made their choice, their office is to stir up enthusiasm and energy, to mobilize resources, to inspire, to create unity – in short, it is the office of 'Leadership'. And the understanding of government on the analogy of military command is present when we speak of our rulers as 'leaders', and when they take the titles of '*Duce*' and 'Fuhrer', or (in remote times) '*Dux*'. And if, on this analogy, this is the office of ruler, there is no doubt about the corresponding character of his subjects: they will know themselves as 'followers' of a leader – *comites*; they will know themselves as an 'action-group' whose activities are being directed to the achievement of a specific end – 'victory', or whatever corresponds to 'victory' in times of peace.

And if we are inclined to wonder at the plausibility of so attenuated a metaphor in political thought, we may perhaps find it, not merely in the fact that war has been the commonest of all conditions, but also in the solace offered by any purpose so definite and complete as that which is represented by the word 'victory'. But, it is fair to say that this is an analogy of government which has little or nothing to offer to subjects engaged in enterprises of their own choosing and who are disposed to want to choose their opinions and beliefs for themselves and to change them when they feel inclined to do so.

8. The third of our analogies of government – the metaphor of education – is not, perhaps, as ancient as the analogies of estate management and military leadership, but it plays a part no less important in the ideas which cluster round our image of government. To rule is to teach, to instruct. And this at once provokes the question: 'What is it that rulers are to teach their subjects?' Many answers have been given to this question, but the commonest, and the answer in which all the others meet, is: 'To govern is to teach the rules of the good life, to teach virtue'. And if we are puzzled about how so exalted an office should ever have come to be attributed to mundane governors, the puzzle is resolved in a piece of history – in what happened when modern Europe was emerging from the conditions of mediaeval life and thought. For, although this analogy of government and all its entailments may have appeared in other parts of the world and at other times, so far as we are concerned it is a notion that comes to us from our own mediaeval past.

In mediaeval times two authorities were recognized to rule over men's live, a civil authority and an ecclesiastical authority. And it is important to understand that both these authorities were recognized as *governments*; Emperor and Pope, King and Bishop, Prince and Priest, were alike rulers. They exercised a condominium over the lives of their subjects, and every man was a subject of both these rulers. But since the rule of the priest was to inculcate virtue, the rule of the prince (though it was understood to have a variety of aims) was *not* thought of as the education of his subjects in the manners of the virtuous life; it was concerned with orderly rather than virtuous or righteous behaviour. But in the sixteenth century, in a confusion of complicated changes, the priestly office was deprived of its authority, civil rulers found themselves the inheritors of an authority they had never before exercised, and the office of teaching the virtuous life, the office of educators, was added to their powers. And although this change, in one degree or another took place in every European state, it was most marked in those states in which a 'reformed' Christianity came to be established by civil law. And in some of these states it happened for a time that what had been earlier recognized as the office peculiar to the old ecclesiastical authority, when it had been annexed to the office of civil ruler, assumed a dominant place. The 'godly prince', that great political invention of the sixteenth century, was not only a civil ruler who carried out a 'godly reformation' in his dominions but also a prince who 'commanded for truth' among his subjects. The model of such a régime – a régime where to govern was above all to educate in virtue – is to be found in Calvin's Geneva; but this understanding of government was rapidly formalized in the doctrine that to govern is to impose Grace upon Nature. And when, at a later date, in the eighteenth century, the religious passion had somewhat spent itself, this doctrine appeared in a secular idiom – virtue replacing righteousness as the object of government – and found its place among the current analogies of government, reflected to this day both in the formulation of policy and in the making of law. Its entailment is to impose a social purpose upon private and public life; and its tendency is to substitute social duty for either personal judgment or public order. And this relic of sixteenth century circumstances is one of the commonplaces of our political thinking to-day.

9. Now, all these analogies of government have something in common: each understands the activity of governing as the imposition of a more or less comprehensive manner of living upon its subjects. It may, of course, be that the manner of living to be imposed by government is agreeable to the wishes of its subjects: the standard of living acquired and enjoyed in the process of estate management, the 'victory' aimed at in military leadership, and the 'virtue' sought in moral education, may be what is generally desired. Nevertheless, to speak of government as imposing a more or less comprehensive manner of living upon its subjects is an appropriate way of speaking for two reasons. First, each of these activities – estate management, leadership and education – may be conducted by others who are not rulers, but

when they are attributed to government they become a manner of living which nobody can escape. The characteristic of governing is that its authority is single and inescapable. And secondly, while the wishes of many, perhaps those of the majority of subjects, may coincide with the comprehensive manner of living imposed by a government understood to be an estate manager, a military leader or a schoolmaster, it is impossible in a modern European society that it should coincide with the wishes of all. For it is characteristic of modern European societies that a significant number of their members are disposed to want to make their choices in respect of many of these things and connect their happiness with the opportunity of exercising choice.

Now, in this respect the last of our analogies differs from those we have already considered, namely, the analogy of umpirage. This, it might be supposed is the most modern of the analogies of government, reflecting the conduct of a game, like cricket. But in fact it is not less ancient than any of the others; indeed, it is perhaps the most ancient of all analogies. It is a legal analogy; and judges were the first rulers just as courts of law were the first legislators. When governing is understood under this analogy what is being attributed to it is the office of being an independent arbitrator, a third, disinterested person, called in to settle a dispute between two people who are unable to agree with one another. An 'umpire' is a 'non-peer', a person not in the same position as the disputants; that is, a person not himself concerned with the matter in dispute.

The ruler, then, understood within the limits of this analogy, is not the supplier of impetus to the activities of his subjects, his office is not to whip up their enthusiasm or their energies, but, on the contrary, to act as a lightning-conductor when the activities of his subjects generate undue heat. He is a stabilizer, a peace-maker, who, having no interest of his own, can act as an adjustor of the conflicting interests of others. And pursuing no specific end of his own, it does not fall to the ruler to mobilize the energies of his subjects and set them going in a direction of his own choice. In short, on this reading, the office of government is an office of reconciliation.

Such an office, it is clear, may be performed in various ways. In a society not much given to innovation, one in which new interests rarely arise and in which new desires, opinions and activities are the exception rather than the rule, governing will be an activity not much in evidence. On the other hand, in a society, such as our own, where activities, opinions, beliefs and desires are not only passionately held, but are rapidly changing, the office of umpire may be of immense importance. Further, an umpire may have at his disposal a law and his decisions may, in effect, be decisions about the proper interpretation of this law; or, on the other hand, he may be called upon to settle disputes where there is no law to guide him – or, indeed, he may settle whole classes of disputes by making a law. For, the analogy of umpirage is serviceable not only in the understanding of the administration of a known law (as in the case of umpiring in a game), but also in the making of law – because all law is, in fact, the reconciliation of interests, or the decision whose interest should prevail, a decision which cannot properly be made by anyone concerned with the interests to be considered.

There is, then, a remarkable difference between this analogy of government and all the others we have considered. In the others, governing is understood to be an activity of management of one kind or another; the office of ruler is to supply direction and inspiration and energy to the activities of his subjects. But where ruling is understood as umpirage, its office is not to supply direction and energy, but to supply control of another sort. And this difference may itself be elucidated in terms of another analogy – that of an engine. An engine requires something to make it 'go' – steam, petrol or a contrivance of springs or weights. But in most engines – in steam traction engines, in gramophone engines and in clocks, for example – there is incorporated an additional contrivance, not designed to make it 'go', but designed to control the movement of its parts, a contrivance called a 'governor'. Indeed, it may be supposed that those who gave this name to this part of an engine were thinking of government in terms of umpirage, in terms of a placating activity rather than an energizing activity.

10. Now, I do not pretend that these four metaphors exhaust the current analogies of government. If we look into our thoughts about governing and about being governed we shall I think find many others. And indeed, there are two oth-

ers of a more general character which are of the greatest importance, because they condition the main directions of our thoughts. Human activities are, generally speaking, of two sorts; namely, activities in which we are *making* something and activities in which we are *doing* something – that is, activities of craftsmanship in which there is an end-product, and activities in which there is no end-product to be achieved. It was the melancholy achievement of Plato to have imposed the analogy of craftsmanship upon government in a society apt to think of governing on the analogy of *doing*. And I think we shall find that we are apt to think of governing sometimes as an activity of craftsmanship and sometimes as an activity of doing. Indeed, the analogies of government we have already considered may be seen to divide themselves in this matter. But putting this on one side, it is useful to consider some of the entailments of the analogies we have had before us.

Governing, on whatever analogy it is understood, is an exclusive activity – no association can be ruled by two independent governments. If the analogy that directs our thoughts is that of estate management or military leadership or education or umpirage, then, in the end, there can only be *one* estate-manager, *one* designer of 'victory', *one* schoolmaster, *one* umpire. But it is noticeable that, whereas umpirage can appropriately be thought of as an exclusive activity (and is therefore a supremely appropriate analogy for government) estate management and the rest are activities which need not be in this manner exclusive. There may be powerful arguments in favour of governing as estate management, but there is no *necessity* for estate management to be performed by government – that is by a single, exclusive authority; and when it is performed by government, then there can, in the end, be only one estate and one manager of it. But it is *necessary* for umpirage to be the activity of a single exclusive authority. For though an arbitrator may be (and on occasion is) chosen *ad hoc* to deal with a particular dispute, the office of arbitrator cannot be occupied by anyone who is not given a special authority which, in the virtue of the activity, he cannot share with anyone else. And again, if ruling is properly understood to be estate management or education or military command, then it cannot, at the same time, be properly understood to be umpirage. That is to say, a referee who is apt himself to take a kick at the ball, or the Chairman of a public meeting who will allow only one side to state its arguments, or a judge who listens only to the prosecution, is a referee, a chairman or a judge who is not performing his proper office. We may, then, be dissatisfied with all these analogies; we may think that none of them really corresponds to what we think about government; we may think that each of them is appropriate in some conditions and circumstances and inappropriate in others; but I think one of our conclusions must be that, if the analogy of umpirage is appropriate, then the others are not appropriate, because while all the others are variations on a single theme and may be made to cohere with one another, the office of umpire is radically different from any of the other offices we are apt to attribute to government.

And further, on all these analogies governing is recognized to be the exercise of power and authority; but while in some of them the activity is understood as one of acquiring power and authority in order to impose a substantive condition of life upon their subjects – a condition such as prosperity, or virtue; in others, and particularly in umpirage, the activity is understood as that of preventing any single substantive condition imposing itself to the exclusion of all others. And while it is clear that to impose a single substantive condition requires great power as well as great authority, it is clear also that to prevent any single substantive condition imposing itself may require great authority but will not require such vast power.

And finally, we may (and we often do) feel disposed to judge the appropriateness of our analogies of government by considering their entailments in terms of the appropriate composition and constitution of governments. Where government is understood under the analogy of estate management or military leadership or education or umpirage, certain specific qualities will naturally be looked for in governors, and the problem of the constitution of government resolves itself into the problem of how to collect together a government composed of men certain or likely to have these qualities. If government is estate management – what are the qualities of estate managers? If government is education in virtue, what are the qualities of good moral teachers? If government is umpirage, what are the qualities of good umpires? And here again, we may reach the conclusion that the indifference, the independence, and the sort of understanding which belong to a good umpire are qualities we are more likely to get in governments appointed in the way in which we are apt to appoint them, than the qualities that belong, for example, to good estate managers. And we may find our thoughts about the proper activities of government confirmed or contradicted by our thoughts about the proper composition of governments.

11. Now, it has not been my object to *recommend* to you any particular analogy of government as the best or most appropriate. My object has been to remind you that when we reflect upon the activity of governing and the experience of being governed we are apt to have recourse to analogies; and the variety of our analogies of government is apt to make our current image of government a confused image. The object of reflection is to remove some of this confusion and to make us more steadily aware of what in fact we do think.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[i] LSE 1/1/31. Typescript with autograph corrections. The reference to the creation of a constitution for Cyprus suggests 1959 as a possible date.

Nineteen

The Constitution of Liberty

This work is a rehandling of one of the most notable idioms of European political experience and reflection – 'liberalism', 'libertarianism' or as Hayek himself is inclined to call it (in order to avoid the ambiguities which have overtaken these words) 'Whiggism'. It purports to describe this doctrine about government, to say where it came from and the process in which it was gradually elucidated and refined, and to distinguish the better from the worse arguments which may be used to support it. It is, therefore, in part an historical work and in part speculation and philosophical. But, throughout, the author is examining a doctrine which is not only deeply rooted in European civilization but one which he believes to be the most deserving of our adherence. It is a scholarly work, but there is nothing 'neutral' about it; the author is recommending at the same time as he is explaining.

It is a long and solid work, impressive in its candour and in the patience with which each point is elaborated and in the clear picture which emerges. It demands patience from its reader, but (though it is not sprightly) it is never boring or irrelevant. It is well-arranged, its argumentation is forceful, the illustrative material is well-chosen, it easily carries its considerable load of learning and it maintains an impetus which carries the reader over the duller passages. I think it may be said to accomplish its purpose with a good deal to spare.

Professor Hayek's views are already well-known, but I would judge his purpose here is to put them down comprehensively, to refine them and to make them proof against the kind of criticism they have already received. In those respects he breaks new ground and the reader is not at all inclined to say: 'Oh Hayek again; we know what he thinks'. He has got rid of many of his exaggerations commonly associated with his views, but there is no weakening in the essential doctrine – only a clearer perception of it, what it genuinely implies and what it excludes.

The doctrine Hayek has undertaken to re-expound is, of course, of the greatest interest to every student of politics, even to those temperamentally averse from it, and the care, originality, and profundity with which he handles it must command attention. I think it falls short of being an exciting book, but it is certainly impressive. It emanates, of course, from America and there is much in it that refers directly to the American scene, but there is nothing so distinctively American about it as to matter an English reader. There is in fact as much about past and contemporary English politics as there is about American.

It will be read, in the first place, by those concerned with the academic study of politics, and I would expect it to find a place among the books recommended to students in any university faculty of politics. Further, it has a topical interest which will appeal to a wider audience interested in politics: it would probably appeal, for example, to political study-groups. Taken altogether this is not, I suppose, a very numerous audience, but it is not an insignificant one, and I should judge his book to have a good deal of staying power. I doubt whether it would achieve the trend of popularity achieved by Popper's *Open Society*, but in respect of its quality it certainly deserves to do so. I do not know of any book which could be said to compete with it at all directly (it is too individual for that), but it might be regarded as complimentary to and appealing to the same sort of audience as Mr Polanyi's *The Logic of Liberty*, de Jouvenel's *Sovereignty* and (in America) the late H.C. Simons's *Economic Policy for a Free Society*.

The MS as I received it is uneven; the first half has been much more thoroughly corrected than the second, and many of the notes are missing. But as I understand it is not proposed to print an English edition from this MS, any verbal comments I might be tempted to make are out of place.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[1] LSE 1/2/3. Typescript. F.A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, Routledge, London, 1960.

Twenty

Work and Play

1. Without pretending to be scientific about it, the world may be imagined to be a vast collection of existences – things and substances of various compositions and kinds – each of which is what it is, and moves, changes, grows, or decays as it does, by reason of its relation to other things.

Things, existing in various ways by, and in some cases, at the expense of, or *on*, other things. This image is sometimes called the Economy of Nature, and it is sometimes said to have a 'balance' or equilibrium of needs and satisfactions.

Now, human beings are recognizably part of this economy of nature. They, also, are what they are, move, change, grow, flourish or decay as they do by reason of their relation to other things. Like the lion, the rose-bush or the iceberg, a man has needs which, if they are not supplied by his environment, he goes hungry, wilts or melts away, becomes something different, perishes.

Nevertheless, it has also been recognized that human beings have some characteristics which, at least partly, distinguish them from the other components of this natural world. The chief of these characteristics is commonly denoted by the Latin word *sapiens*, 'intelligence'.

Homo Sapiens: human beings distinguished by something called *intelligence*.

What 'intelligence' means here is the ability and the propensity, not merely to accept what the world happens to offer in satisfaction of needs, but to seek for what it does not immediately offer, to adapt, to use, to appropriate, and to invent: the propensity to choose and to determine for ourselves what our relationship to the world shall be. And in this process, needs are replaced by wants.

Indeed, to be 'intelligent', here, means to be a creature not merely of needs which *must* be satisfied, but of wants which are imagined, chosen and pursued. Needs are limited, and are related to some notion of bare existence. Wants are inexhaustible because they are related to no fixed condition of things.

Man, then, is distinguished as a creature of wants. It is as a creature of wants that he has acquired, not only other characteristics that have been said to distinguish him (his disposition to *make* things, to fabricate, and his invention and use of tools), but also his peculiar attitude toward the world around him: both positive and intelligent.

This world – the whole of it, all its components without exception – he is disposed to think of as material for satisfying his wants. It is something to be used; it is something upon which he may impose his own purposes. It is something to be subjected to himself. It is almost an enemy to be conquered; and having been conquered, to be exploited.

Now, it is not to be supposed that this attitude to the world was acquired all at once. In by-gone times there were sacrosanct trees which might not be used for fire-wood, and holy animals which might not be slaughtered. And there are peoples (in India, for example) who have been more hesitant than we have been to acquire this view of the world, or (at any rate) hesitant about letting it become a dominant attitude. The ancient Romans, oddly enough, had a much more reverent attitude toward at least the earth than the ancient Greeks, who regarded it much more as an enemy to be subdued. But by and large, the human race has come more and more to take this positive attitude: the world understood as material for satisfying wants.

Of course, the history of mankind has not been confined to this enterprise of doing and making, of using the resources of the world in order to achieve that sort of human happiness which comes from satisfying its inexhaustible wants. He has discovered other activities for himself which we shall come to later.

Moreover, there have always been some recognized limits to this enterprise. What we call 'morality' is, in part, a refusal to take this attitude to other human beings, a refusal to regard them (like the other components of the natural world) simply as materials to be merely used. But it can hardly be denied that the major part of the energies of mankind have been devoted, from earliest times, to this enterprise of using the resources of the world to satisfy its inexhaustible wants, of making out of the world something which corresponds to our desires.

Some people have tended to think of this enterprise as mainly, or fundamentally, a matter of physical exertion. But this is an obvious mistake. It has been an enterprise of immense thought and intelligence.

In order to master the world and to use it for the satisfaction of human wants, men have had to learn from nature. And the knowledge which has made possible our current mastery of the world, knowledge of the qualities of the different components of the world and of their eligibility to be used in satisfying our wants, has been accumulated over thousands of years.

The inventiveness of human beings has devised new means for exploiting the natural resources of the world – tools and machines of all kinds; and new materials have been contrived by human beings out of combinations of natural materials in order to satisfy new wants.

And all this knowledge and these skills have been handed down from generation to generation in an appropriate sort of education – an education in 'useful knowledge', as we call it – knowledge which enables us to use nature to satisfy our wants.

2. Now, having moved from the realm of needs to the realm of wants, from desiring to live to desiring to live well (that is, better and better), and having acquired the uniquely human propensity to attempt things which it did not know quite how to achieve, it is not surprising that the best energies of mankind have been spent on this enterprise.

Every success, every want satisfied in this enterprise, must be only a prelude to a new adventure. For how could this process be halted? Only by a man ceasing to have wants, or by his having wants which he chooses not to satisfy. But many wants demand recurrent satisfaction, and it would be almost a contradiction to imagine a man who gave no thought to how they might be satisfied better or more easily. And while men have often exercised choice, it has usually been a choice between which of their wants they will seek a satisfaction for now and which satisfactions shall for the moment be postponed. It is only the odd and rare individual who has made a choice to have done with wants – to turn them back into needs.It is not, then, surprising that this effort to achieve the sort of happiness that is to be had from satisfying human wants should have come to be regarded as 'the great business and occupation of life' (as an eighteenth-century writer put it), and that it should have been given a name.

It is called 'work'. 'Work' is a continuous toilsome activity, unavoidable in creatures moved by wants, in which the natural world is made to supply satisfactions for those wants. It is something from which animals are exempt, except those who have the misfortune to be harnessed to human enterprise; and it is something unknown to a creature of mere needs. Indeed, 'work' is so far typical of the human species that it is reasonable to add it to the epithets by which we distinguish it: *Homo Sapiens* is *Homo Laborans*: a 'workman'.

The mastery of the human race over its natural environment has not, of course, been a uniform process. There have been periods of rapid advance, periods of relative stagnation, and periods, even, when useful knowledge about the world has been forgotten and skills have been lost. Wood, stone, and iron each were used and experimented with for long periods before even their simple uses were discerned.

We happen to live at a time when this process has been quite remarkably accelerated; and we know enough to be able to see the beginning of this acceleration about four centuries ago. And there began to emerge at that time two beliefs which have gradually gained a firm hold upon us.

(1) It came to be believed, first, that 'work' (this activity of exploiting the natural resources of the world for the satisfaction of human wants and the attitude towards the world that went with it) was not only typical of mankind but was the proper attitude and occupation of mankind. Indeed, it came to be believed that this ought to be the exclusive attitude and engagement to which all else should be subordinated.

This belief, that human activity ought to be directed towards promoting what John Locke called 'the advantages and conveniences of life', and that the human mind ought to concern itself exclusively with gathering together and putting in order the sort of knowledge this enterprise demanded, useful knowledge, is a moral belief – a belief about how we *ought* to spend our lives. And, as the normal way of thinking about moral obligations was to understand them as the commands of God, the first defense or justification of this belief was an attempt to show that this is what God commanded.

One of the earliest arguments was Biblical. God, it was said, as recorded in the Book of Genesis, had given to mankind the natural world the natural world and everything in it; he had imposed no restriction whatever upon its exploitation for the satisfaction of human wants; and he had commanded mankind to use this gift. The natural world existed to serve human purposes.

And the sin of Adam modified this situation only to the extent that, instead of all man's wants being automatically answered by nature, he was condemned to 'work', to toil and pain, in order to satisfy them.

Thus the proper pattern of human life was understood to spring from a divine gift, a divine command and a divine penalty.

3. Now, this moral belief began to be partnered about four centuries ago by a second belief of a different sort – namely, an immense optimism about the success of this enterprise of compelling the natural world to satisfy human wants.

It was believed that if we only set about it in a really determined manner, if we bent all our energies and intelligence to it, if our efforts were unrelaxed, the human race, in a relatively short time, would actually achieve, perhaps finally achieve, the sort of happiness which is to be had from the satisfaction of wants.

Wants might proliferate, indeed, they surely would; but if we worked hard enough and intelligently enough, they would all be certainly satisfied. An all-out, organized assault upon nature would be followed by success. Idleness and inefficiency in exploiting the resources of the natural world were not only sinful, the major sins; they were also foolish.

This, perhaps, was the dream of a generation that was not only full of energy and fascinated by an enterprise in which it thought of itself as a pioneer, but whose imagination more readily embraced satisfactions than the new wants those satisfactions would generate. But it is the dream we have inherited; this is the tide that carries us along. It informs all our politics; it binds us to this necessity of a 4% per annum increase in productivity; and it is a dream we have spread about the world so that it has become the dream common to all mankind.

Since the sixteenth century, when it first began to take hold of European peoples, there have been some ups and downs of confidence. The nineteenth century was, in some respects, a notable period of depression and anxiety. What was called the law of diminishing returns indicated that the work devoted to satisfying wants must become progressively less effective; and Malthus announced the depressing but undeniable truth that, if left to themselves, the number of those seeking satisfactions for their wants must increase faster than the supply of those satisfactions.

But these thoughts, which greatly depressed the Victorians, have inspired us with fresh energy, and I suppose that at no time in the history of the world has mankind been more determined to devote itself to exploitation of nature for the satisfaction of its wants, less dismayed at the proliferation of wants to be satisfied, or more confident of success.

This enterprise, I have suggested, is as old as the human race, as old as the emergence of man as a creature of wants rather than of needs. What is comparatively new is the faith and fervor with which it is pursued and the manner in which all else tends to be regarded as subordinate to the happiness that comes from the satisfaction of wants.

4. And yet there is something lacking in this happiness, and something incompletely satisfying to human beings in this satisfaction. A creature composed entirely of wants, who understands the world merely as the means of satisfying those wants and whose satisfactions generate new wants endlessly, is a creature of unavoidable anxieties. If he is temporarily successful he may forget these anxieties; but he is in the position of a man who has mortgaged his future in a huge hire-purchase debt. And this has often been recognized, and not only during the last four centuries of our history when it has become particularly noticeable.

I do not mean merely the observation that this sort of happiness entails work and that work, because it is painful, is something less than wholly desirable. This has always been recognized. In the Biblical story 'work' itself was recognized as a defect, a punishment, a curse. Nobody likes to 'work'.

I mean something much more than this. I mean the recognition that to be a creature of wants, desires which cannot have more than a temporary satisfaction because each satisfaction, however easily achieved, leads only to new wants – to be a creature of wants is itself a curse, a condemnation to a life in which every achievement is also a frustration.

It is not only that everything which is produced in satisfaction of a want rapidly perishes, or that many wants demand recurrent satisfactions, but that the satisfaction of every want generates a new want which in turn calls for satisfaction. Doing, and the attitude to the world it entails, is (as the hymn says) 'a deadly thing'. It is an activity of getting and spending, of making and consuming, endlessly.

5. Now, it has always been recognized that the life of a creature of wants is frustrating and unsatisfactory; and wherever this sort of life has tended to become predominant – as in the modern world – this recognition has become more acute.

Rousseau, for example, went back behind the Biblical story and imagined a condition in which mankind had not yet discovered wants; he had only needs that the world satisfied easily and for the asking, and which consequently did not generate the attitude towards nature in which it is regarded as something to be conquered and used. Rousseau knew well enough that mankind could never return to this imaginary condition, but, because the frustration of wants was absent from it, he imagined it as a kind of Golden Age.

Further, many of the great religions (including Christianity) have, among other things, offered believers relief from the tread-mill existence of the creature of wants in a very different view of the world and of the proper activities of mankind. They have taught the happiness that comes from not having wants.

But apart from all this, and in spite of the fact that 'work' and the satisfaction of wants has usually engaged the greater part of the attention of mankind, there is another form of activity, peculiar to human beings, which does not suffer from the defects inherent in 'work' and the satisfaction of wants – namely, 'play'.

The complete character of a human being does not come into view unless we add *Homo Ludens*, man the player, to

Homo Sapiens, intelligent man, *Homo Faber*, man the maker of things, and *Homo Laborans*, man the worker.

6. Now, I have used the word 'work' in a wide sense, to stand for the activity of satisfying wants in a world (such as ours) which can be made to satisfy wants but does not do so automatically. And I am, also, going to use the word 'play' in a wide sense, to stand for an activity which, because it is not directed to the satisfaction of wants, entails an attitude to the world which is not concerned to use it, to get something out of it, or to make something of it, and offers satisfactions which are not at the same time frustrations.

This, indeed, is what we usually mean by 'play'. A game may, of course, be a contest for a prize, but this is always regarded as incidental: in its proper character it is an experience of enjoyment, which has no ulterior purpose, no further result aimed at, and begins and ends in itself. It is not a striving after what one has not got, and it is not an assault upon nature to yield the satisfaction of a want.

Moreover, it is on account of these characteristics (which we emphasize when we say: 'the game's the thing') that a game appears as a 'free' activity. It may have rules of its own, and it may be played with energy and require effort; but it is emancipated from the seriousness, the purposefulness, and the alleged 'importance' of 'work' and the satisfaction of wants.

'Play', in short, stands for something which is neither 'work' nor 'rest'; it is an activity, but not an activity that seeks the satisfaction of wants. For this reason, Aristotle called it 'non-laborious activity' – activity which nevertheless is not 'work'. It is a 'leisure' activity, not only because it belongs to the occasions when we are set free (or set ourselves free) from 'work', but because it is performed in a 'leisurely' manner. A 'leisurely' manner does not mean merely 'slowly'; it means, 'without the anxieties and absence of cessation that belong to the satisfaction of wants'.

Now, the obvious example of 'play' is a game of any sort – so long, of course, as the game is not corrupted by having the character of 'work' imposed upon it, by being made a means to an ulterior end. But, if this is what we mean by 'play', there are other human activities, not normally thought of as 'games', which belong to it because they too do not entail an attitude to the world in which it is regarded as material to be used to satisfy wants, and because they too are free from the anxieties and endlessness which belong to the satisfaction of wants.

The chief of these activities are understanding and explaining the world and the activity of poetic imagination. And, it may be remarked, that among the ancient Greeks, both these activities were recognized as 'leisure' or 'free' activities, first because they were characteristics of the free man and not the slave, and later because they were recognized to exist for their own sake and to be emancipated from the anxiety and endlessness of the satisfaction of wants.

7. To try to understand and to explain the world, or any part or aspect of it, obviously entails an attitude towards the world which is not one in which it is regarded as material which can be used to satisfy wants.

The aim in 'work' is to change the world, to use it, to make something out of it; the aim of explanation is to illuminate it, to see it as it is. The aim of 'work' is to exert power over the hostile world, to subdue it, and to extract from it what may be useful for satisfying wants; the aim of 'understanding' is to discern the intelligibility of the world. The aim of 'work' is to impress some temporary human purpose upon some component of the world; the aim of explanation is to reveal the world as it is and not merely in respect of its eligibility to satisfy human wants.

It is, then, in the thoughts of philosophers, of scientists, and of historians that the great explanatory adventures of mankind are to be found. Philosophy, science, and history are different adventures into this realm of understanding and explanation. In pursuing any of them we are emancipated from the whole attitude towards the world which looks upon it as material for satisfying wants and from the anxieties that belong to this attitude. This is not 'work', and it is not 'rest' – it is 'play'!

Now, I have not forgotten that I said that using the world for the satisfaction of wants is a mental activity and that it requires thought and knowledge – knowledge of the different qualities and characteristics of the components of the world. What I want to suggest is that this knowledge should not be confused with scientific knowledge, and winning this sort of knowledge is not to be confused with the scientific enterprise of understanding and explaining.

Of course, the thoughts about the world which scientists have had, and the discoveries that they have made, are often eligible to be used for the exploitation of the resources of the world for the satisfaction of human wants. But 'science' itself is a great intellectual adventure of understanding and explaining which is free from the necessity of providing useful knowledge. What we have here are two entirely different attitudes towards the world: the one concerned with truth and error, the other with what is useful or useless; the one concerned to understand and the other concerned to discover how it works in order to make use of it.

Philosophy, science, and history are, then, activities that belong, not to 'work', but to 'play'. In pursuing them, or in reading the thoughts of those who pursue them, we are not, strictly speaking, 'working' but 'playing'.

8. The activity of the poetic imagination is, perhaps, even more securely insulated from any liability of being confused with the satisfaction of wants than these explanatory activities – and is less likely to be corrupted by it.

The practical imagination of the statesman or the businessman which sees what use the world can be put to and which foresees the condition of things which will appear when they have imposed what they imagined upon the world, cannot be confused with the poetic imagination.

The one is a dream to be followed by an effort to make it 'come true'; the other is a dream enjoyed for its own sake. The world for the poet is not material to be used for satisfying wants, it is something to be contemplated. He allows it to form itself around him without any urge to make it different from what it is. Poetic imagination is not a preliminary to doing something, it is an end in itself. It is not 'work'; it is 'play'.

To the ancient Greeks, who thought about these things, this seemed to be much more clearly the case with what they called the 'musical arts', the arts of poetry, dancing, music, and acting. And therefore they distinguished these (which belonged to the Muses) from other arts – the arts (like sculpture and painting) which seemed to them to have so great an element of using the materials of the world that they qualified to be understood as crafts rather than arts, and they were given not to the Muses, but to a god of 'work'.

But I think we have risen above this distinction and can recognize in the activity of the painter and the sculptor, no less than in that of the poet and the dancer, the emancipation from the deadliness of doing which distinguishes art from 'work'.

9. Now, my main point has been to suggest that, apart from 'work', the activity of using the world to satisfy human wants, mankind has devised or stumbled upon other activities and attitudes towards the world, the activities I have grouped together as 'play'. And it is in these activities that human beings have believed themselves to enjoy a freedom and an illumination which the satisfaction of wants can never supply. It is not *Homo Sapiens* and *Homo Laborans* the clever user of the resources of the world, but *Homo Ludens,* the one engaged in the activities of 'play', who is the civilized man.

The gifts these activities offer us are easily recognizable. But the activities themselves are vulnerable and easily corrupted. Our way of living has generated an enormous pressure, not merely to make the satisfaction of wants the center of our attention, but to subordinate all other activities to it. And this way lies corruption of 'play'.

Instead of regarding 'work' and 'play' as two great and diverse experiences of the world, each offering us what the other lacks, we are often encouraged to regard all that I have called 'play', either as a holiday designed to make us 'work' better when it is over, or merely as 'work' of another sort.

In the first of these attitudes the real gifts of art and poetry and of all the great explanatory adventures of mankind are lost: they become mere 'recreation' – 'relaxation' from the proper business of life, mere 'rest'. In the second attitude, these gifts are corrupted: philosophy, science, history, poetry are merely recognized for the useful knowledge they may happen to supply and are thus assimilated into the so-called great business of human life – satisfying human wants.

The point at which this corruption is most likely to appear, and where it is most dangerous when it does appear, is, of course, in education. In these days when the satisfaction of human wants is taken to be the only important activity, those who devise our systems of education are apt to find a place for all that I have called 'play' only if they can regard it as 'work' of another sort. And generations may be deprived of that acquaintance with the activities of *Homo Ludens* which was once thought to be the better part of education.

But, as it happens, we have a defense against this barbarity. An old way of thinking about these things which has not quite gone out of fashion. The word 'school' we are apt to associate with 'work', and often with acquiring the sort of useful knowledge and skill without which the 'work' of satisfying wants is ineffective. But the word itself means exactly the opposite. It comes from a Greek word σχολη, which means 'leisure' or 'free time'. A school was understood to be a place where one was introduced to those activities and attitudes towards the world that were not concerned with satisfying wants, where one was introduced to those activities of explanation and imagination which were 'free' because they were pursued for their own sake and were emancipated from the limitations and anxieties of 'work'.

This way of thinking about education reappeared among the Romans in the expression *liberalia studia*, 'liberal studies' or studies liberated from the concerns of practical doing, studies concerned with all the activities which belong to 'play' rather than 'work'. It was from the Romans we acquired it; and we have not yet lost it.

Nobody supposes that the whole of a man's education should be concerned exclusively with the emancipated activities I have called 'play'; there must be a place for learning how to use the resources of the world for the satisfaction of human wants.

But we are fortunate if we are not encouraged to confuse the two quite different experiences of the world; and if we are allowed to pursue our 'liberal' studies undistracted by what does not belong to them, we may thank the survival of an ancient tradition of education for our good fortune.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[1] LSE 1/1/48. Typescript, with autograph corrections. Printed in *First Things*, 54 (1995), and was online (on 2 October 2003) at www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9506/articles/oake.html.

Twenty-one

Between Past and Future

Most writing concerned with the history of ideas may be expected to add something to what we think of as our stock of knowledge; some discovery is divulged or some neglected feature of the intellectual landscape is lighted up, and appropriately we appraise such writing in terms of the specific contribution it makes. Now and again, however, writers appear who illuminate the whole landscape from some new direction, changing the appearance of even its most solid conformations. This, for example, was the achievement of those writers who, in the last century, explored the hypothesis of social evolution. Here, what falls to be appraised is not the new appearance of things but the validity of the hypothesis itself; and, regrettably enough, what seemed to be light often turns out to be a new sort of darkness. But there is a third kind of writer whose work is distinguished by no single hypothesis but which, by its profound observation of a number of what are already recognised to be prominent features, and by bringing these observations together, succeeds in imposing a new pattern of light and shade upon the whole landscape. Hannah Arendt is a writer of this sort.

She has taught us to look for a certain quality in her books, and now that we have learned our lesson she always fulfils our expectations. It is a quality of intelligence in which great and ready learning, the skill of always 'cutting between the joints' and brilliant powers of generalization combine to make each piece of her writing not only a profoundly thought-provoking composition but also a dazzling performance. This virtuosity does not depend upon choosing few and simple themes or upon the avoidance of the drudgery of thinking, nor is the pleasure it generates derived from a continuous encounter with the unexpected; there is magic in it, but no deception or trickery. But it is so great, and so unusual in a didactic writer, that it is something which the reader almost has to overcome if he is to avoid being submerged in a wave of intellectual excitement. It is a style, not so much of writing as of thinking and handling ideas, and its brilliance may arouse suspicion; but since there can be no question of its general validity or invalidity, this must remain (if it does remain) the suspicion not of being sent on an unprofitable journey but of being unduly beguiled by an exceedingly gifted, learned and original guide.

Between Past and Future is a collection of six essays whose central theme is 'the crisis of our time'. Occasionally Dr Arendt seems to think of this as an event which has happened and in virtue of which we have come to inhabit a world different from that of our ancestors and in many respects different from that of our parents. And in this mood I think she is guilty of some exaggeration. More frequently, however, and properly, she interprets it as a disposition of our thoughts and habits of actions, often qualified, by no means inescapable, which has been growing upon us since the sixteenth century. And the modern writers in whom she is interested – Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Burckhardt – engage her attention because it is they who began to diagnose (not always correctly) the character of a movement which had been largely imperceptible. As she understands it this crisis is 'political' – that is, it is a disposition of our thoughts about what Hegel called the world of objective mind. In its most general character it constitutes an alienation of ourselves from this world which we have made for ourselves; but this general character is reflected in our present detachment from our past, in the disappearance of a sense of tradition, in the desuetude of the notion of political authority and in the confusion of our thoughts about human freedom, about the education of children, and about culture.

To other writers this theme would be primarily an opportunity for reproof and possibly prescription, but while she observes our impotence to deal with questions which were successfully handled by our ancestors, Dr Arendt's design is pre-eminently explanatory. In elucidating this crisis she is unavoidably led to explore the Greco-Roman-Christian sources of our culture. If the notion of political authority has disappeared from our world, what (she asks) are the essential features of this idea, with whom was it (both in theory and in practice) a compelling idea, what were the circumstances of its disappearance, and what the entailments? If we have lost a sense of tradition, what precisely is it that we have lost? If we are accustomed to think of political activity in terms of an analogy of fabrication, where did we get this idea and what effect has it upon our conduct? The scale upon which she is obliged to consider these and the many other questions which her theme suggests to her forbids any detailed account of the mediations of the change which has overtaken us, but in place of this Dr Arendt gives us from her great store of learning a multitude of insights – about the difference between our notions of history and those of the Greeks, about the importance of the idea of authority in Roman politics and its unimportance in Greek, about religion and politics at the beginning of our era, about the emergence of the secular world, about the analogies in terms of which political activity has been made intelligible, about the emergence of the public world of politics and its relation to the private world and to the 'social' world, about the different attitudes towards the natural world which have conditioned and been conditioned by our thoughts about the political world, and about the transformation which the hierarchy of human activities has undergone during the last four centuries of our history.

In all this Dr Arendt draws upon the evidence of the popular meanings of words and upon the writers who most closely reflect common ways of thinking, the historians, the orators and the poets. But it has often happened that what we have fastened upon in our intellectual inheritance is not some residue of earlier political experience, but an analogy or a manner of thinking derived from reflective writers such as Plato or Aristotle or St Augustine, and some of the most illuminating pages in this book are concerned with what popular thought has taken (not always to its advantage) from the philosophers. Many of the general ideas which Dr Arendt uses in these 'excursions in political thought' as points upon which to take bearings and in relation to which to 'fix' historical situations will be familiar to readers of *The Human Condition*, and, for me at least, these essays remove some of the obscurities of this most remarkable intellectual apparatus which she has constructed for herself.

Since the virtue of this book lies in the profoundly observed distinctions and the brilliantly observed connections which fill its pages, and in the learning which informs every turn of its argument, it is not surprising that an occasional note of exaggeration should intrude. Writing at this level of generalization the peaks are apt to appear higher and the valleys deeper than they are, the differences between Greek and Roman and between ourselves as we are and ourselves as we were larger, and the degree to which a disposition of thought has managed to impose itself greater than it really is. But in a book of this kind, which touches the history of European civilization at so many points and touches nothing without adding to its intelligibility, there is something to be learned from these exaggerations and, indeed, from the puzzles which remain.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[1] LSE 1/2/3. Typescript. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, Viking Press, New York, 1961.

Twenty-two

What is History?

1

Mr Carr is a writer who has always taken an independent view of things. One might call him an *enfant terrible* – except that his pronouncements, although often shocking, lack the quality of ingenuousness. The shock delivered by Mr Carr has caused some people to re-examine their prejudices. Others have found Mr Carr shocking on account of his retention of prejudices which they have long ago found good reason to abandon: to these he seems to be an unaccountably old-fashioned thinker nibbling at the edge of stale ideas.

Beyond question his most notable work is his *History of Soviet Russia;* whatever doubts one may have about the manner in which it is written, it must be recognized as a considerable achievement. He is, then, a writer who has made a name as a writer of history. But in the book I am going to talk about, he comes before us, not as a writer of history, but as a writer about history. His theme is the question, What is History? And I want in this talk to consider how Mr Carr understands this question, and what answers he is disposed to give to the various questions which he finds to compose this large question.

What sort of question is this question, What is History? Some people who have discussed it have understood it to be a question about the activity of the historian: and for them, the question can be restated as, What sort of enquiry is the historian engaged in and what sort of conclusions may it be expected to yield? To others the question, What is History? is a question about the course of events itself; and for them it can be restated as, What has been discovered about the past? Most people, I think, would consider these two questions to be different from one another: the first, they would recognize as a philosophical question about the character of historical enquiry, and the second they would recognize as a question about the alleged results of historical enquiry.

Now, the odd thing about Mr Carr is that he is not disposed to recognize any significant differences between these two questions. And in trying to answer the question, What is History? he sometimes gives us his thoughts about the character of historical enquiry and sometimes about the alleged results of historical enquiry. This I find disconcerting; but if we are to understand Mr Carr we must understand that he thinks that these are not two questions, but one question. Indeed, I think, in the end, all questions in the world reduce themselves to one question for Mr Carr. At any rate, the belief that the question, What sort of enquiry is historical enquiry? and the question, What has been discovered about the past? are inseparable, is central to Mr Carr's position, and therefore I want to try to explain how he reaches it. But meanwhile, I would prefer first to consider what he has to say about each separately.

What sort of an enquiry is historical enquiry?

Mr Carr begins by noticing what he believes to be a common but also an erroneous view of the activity of the historian. According to this view, the historian is a collector of facts. He first ascertains what the facts are and he then elucidates the connections between them and draws whatever conclusion he can. I think it is possible that there have been people who believed that this is a good account of historical enquiry, but (as is often the case) when Mr Carr looks round for an example of this belief he makes a false attribution. Who but Mr Carr could ever have thought that this belief was illustrated in the work of Ranke? However, Mr Carr has no difficulty in disposing of this very naïve view of historical enquiry. But if this enquiry does not begin with the collection of facts, where does it begin?

Now, Mr Carr believes that historical enquiry is concerned not with just any facts, but with what he calls 'important' or 'significant' or 'interesting' facts. And consequently, it must begin with a 'standard' or a 'criterion' by means of which to judge the 'significance' of facts. The historian is not a collector of facts, he is a selector of significant facts; what is his principle of selection? Or, to put it another way, every historical fact is an interpretation; and what the historian needs is a principle of interpretation.

Stated in its broadest form, Mr Carr's view is that historical enquiry must be governed by what he calls a 'philosophy of history'. And since the expression 'philosophy of history' stands for some broad understanding of the 'meaning' of the course of events postulated in advance of historical enquiry itself, you can see how easily, for Mr Carr, questions about the nature of historical enquiry slide into questions about the course of events. But Mr Carr tells us much more about the historian's manner of selecting facts than merely that it is governed by a 'philosophy of history': 'significant' facts (the facts interesting to the historian) have ascertainable characteristics. These are some of the things he says about them.

The facts themselves are past events and happenings; and they are significant to the historian (and thus become 'historical' facts) when they concern the relations of human beings to one another in society and when they concern the 'social forces' which cause human actions. Further, historically significant facts are those which concern the 'public' actions of men and women, not their private motives and intentions; and facts which concern large numbers of human beings will always be historically more significant than those which concern a few, because such facts reveal the great 'social forces' at work. And again, historically significant facts are facts which have a certain 'value', the 'value', namely, of having contributed to what has turned out to be the main direction of the course of events: historical enquiry is not concerned with the blind-alleys up which the human race from time to time has gone, except in so far as these may have contributed something to the main direction. Finally, historically significant facts are those which are susceptible of a rational explanation.

In this specification of the characteristics of historically significant facts I have begun with the small items and gone on to the larger; and in the end we return to the notion of a 'philosophy of history'. For this provision that significance lies in an event having made a positive contribution to the main direction of the course of events leads Mr Carr to claim that historical enquiry is impossible without a sense of the overall direction in events, and that it is this sense which supplies the standard or criterion of historical significance. He believes that 'history properly so-called can be written only be those who find and accept a sense of direction in history itself. The belief that we have come from somewhere is closely linked with the belief that we are going somewhere.' Nor is this his largest claim; he goes on to assert that, as he understands it, historical enquiry is impossible without a belief in a 'progressive' direction in the course of events (that is, a belief that we are moving from worse to better) and without some vision of what the future holds in store for us – because these are beliefs entailed in our 'sense of direction'. 'Good historians have the future in their bones.'

Here, then, is Mr Carr's understanding of the sort of enquiry historical enquiry is. It is an enquiry into the past governed by a postulate about the course of events. It is not a mere collection of past facts; on the contrary, it is an ordering of past facts which have been selected in virtue of having been recognized to have a significant place in the main direction characteristic of the course of events. And on this account he is able to restate his position in terms of what he calls 'the function of the historian'. This 'function' is, under the guidance of this postulate, to understand the past in such a manner that we increase our control over the present and the future.

Now, all this is an intelligible account of an enquiry of some sort, even if we may have doubts about it being properly called historical enquiry and doubts about its ability to reach the conclusions designed. But in Mr Carr's mind it provokes a further important question. If historical enquiry is impossible without a postulate of some sort to provide a standard for the determination of 'significant' events, where does this postulate come from? How does the historian acquire it? And Mr Carr spends some time reflecting on this question and noticing the entailments which follow from his answer.

He first enunciates what he takes to be a general principle; that no man can view the past and achieve an understanding of it except through the eyes of the present. The historian is no exception to this rule; his present determines his angle of vision over the past. And what Mr Carr understands by 'the present' in this connection is, generally, the present society in which the historian lives and of which he is necessarily a part; and, in particular, it is the position which an historian himself occupies in that society. He illustrates this principle from the writings of some notable historians: Mommsen, he says, as an historian of ancient Rome, was conditioned by his being a German liberal disillusioned by the abortive revolution of 1848; Meinecke, he says, in his book *Die Idee der Staatsräson*, 'speaks with the divided and bewildered mind of the Weimar republic'. The conclusion, then, Mr Carr seems disposed to reach is that the postulates of historical enquiry are determined by the condition of the society in which the historian finds himself; indeed, he frequently asserts this to be so: 'the work of the historian mirrors the society in which he works'. And he recognizes the validity of two obvious entailments of this view. First, if you want to understand a piece of historical writing you should enquire first into the character and situation of the historian who wrote it; and secondly, that the significance of any piece of historical enquiry is conditioned by the fact that the historian is part of the 'process' which he is enquiring into: new interpretations of the past spring from the new angles of vision which changes in the condition of the present society supply.

Now, all this clearly reflects back upon the character of the postulates which Mr Carr has already told us are the necessary postulates of historical enquiry. In the end, the postulate that an historian requires a sense of the progressive direction of the course of events is a postulate which Mr Carr has derived from the society in which he lives: this is its significance and from this it derives whatever validity it possesses. And in these circumstances (because, in fact, he believes that the postulate of progress is something more than this) he can only congratulate himself on chancing to live in a society which, he says, supplies him with this necessary and fruitful postulate. Nor does he tell us how some historians writing at the present time have escaped being determined by this postulate: he only regrets their escape.

But there are passages in his argument when Mr Carr seems disposed to qualify this extreme position into which he has got historical enquiry. 'Man', he says, 'except perhaps in earliest infancy and in extreme old age, is not totally involved in his environment and unconditionally subject to it.' If it is impossible for the historian to emancipate himself from the postulates given him by his society, he is nevertheless not a mere slave to them. In the main his freedom lies in recognizing himself a child of his age and his work as the mirror of his age, but he is not quite incapable of deriving postulates of his own from the past in the course of his enquiry into it. How this is so, is unfortunately not disclosed.

Here, then, is the meeting place of Mr Carr's two themes: the sort of enquiry historical enquiry is, and the general character of the course of events. Historical enquiry is an interpretation of past events under the guidance of postulates which the historian derives from his society which is itself the product of what went before. Historical writing is the revelation of the whole 'process' in the light of the current situation which has been generated in this process and which is part of it. And it is no use our complaining that we had thought historical enquiry to be a little less at the mercy of current circumstances than this; we should only be grateful for having our illusions dispelled. This, indeed, is the common character of all enquiry – scientific, sociological, philosophical. It is all conditioned in this manner, it is all designed to assist us to master our circumstances and to tell us something about what the future has in store for us; and why should historical enquiry be considered exempt from this rule?

There is much in this book which is interesting but which lies to one side of the main theme. Mr Carr has views about the current direction in which things are going and he has great confidence that it is, from all important points of view, a 'good' direction. The only jarring note is what he identifies as a disposition towards 'irrationalism' which he thinks is dangerous. But as he considers to be 'irrational' any view which does not welcome every change which comes about, his view of what is 'rational' is perhaps a little naïve. He prefers big changes to small; and he thinks it is only a timid sort of foolishness which prevents us riding the wave of change with his own particular brand of senile optimism.

But, apart from these opinions about things in general, he considers two other questions which are central to his theme, namely, the relation of historical to scientific enquiry and the question of causation in history.

On the relation of history to science he is brisk and confident. He is sure that those who have undertaken to explore the differences between historical and scientific enquiry are misguided – there is no significant difference, and such differences as earlier writers observed were based upon an antiquated and now abandoned conception of science. Historians are not concerned merely with what is unique and unrepeated; they are, like the scientist, engaged in making generalizations. Nor is it true that history is an enquiry from which no lessons or conclusions may be drawn; like science, it is capable of yielding lessons for the guidance of human behaviour which have the same character as the technological uses to which the conclusions of scientific enquiry may be put. Moreover, if the predictions of the historian about the future course of events are sometimes less impressive than those of the scientist, they are, nevertheless, of the same kind; both are predictions which concern only probabilities. And the fact that the historian deals with *human* actions does not condemn him to conclusions different in character from those of the scientist, because the historian deals only, by preference, with human actions in bulk. There is, in short, an 'identity of aim' between scientists and historians, and an identity of method: the method of proposing hypotheses and testing them against observations. All this is, however, qualified (perhaps inadvertently) on a later page where Mr Carr says: 'History begins when men begin to think of the passage of time in terms not of natural processes…but of a series of specific events in which men are consciously involved and which they can consciously influence'.

'The study of history is the study of causes', says Mr Carr: 'the study of the causes of historical events and the laws which govern them'. It is true of course that the historian is disposed to look for a 'multiplicity of causes', nevertheless, the truth is, as Mr Carr sees it, that 'every historical argument revolves round the question of the priority of causes'. This sometimes gives to an historical narrative the appearance of 'necessity' – it makes it seem that that things could not have been otherwise than as they were – but this is only a superficial appearance. The historian, according to Mr Carr, is a determinist only in the sense that he will have nothing to do with causeless events. There are 'accidents', no doubt; but 'accident' in history is only the name of a meeting place of two independent causal chains of events. Indeed, as we have seen already, the historian postulates a world of events which is capable of rational explanation; events which are incapable of such an explanation are not historically significant events. And Mr Carr believes that the only rational explanation of anything is a causal explanation.

So far, I have tried to set out the main thoughts which have come to Mr Carr when he has been reflecting upon the question, What is History? It is to be regretted that he has not carried any of them very far and that his confident forthrightness is not partnered with lucidity and order. His continuous use of the word 'history' in two different senses is, to say the least, disconcerting. But, taken together, these thoughts compose a fairly coherent point of view. It is an odd mixture of rather antiquated Positivism and what he believes to be an up-to-date view of the nature of human enquiry, especially scientific enquiry. In my next talk I want to say something about the difficulties which I think stand in our way of our accepting both the view as a whole and many of the details which compose it.

2

In my earlier talk I described Mr Carr's understanding of the question, What is History? and noticed some of the things he said in trying to answer it. I want now to make some comment.

In the first place, it is unfortunate that Mr Carr should have embarked upon the consideration of this question with so little preparation and with such exiguous philosophical equipment. He constantly undertakes to clear up what he calls the 'muddles' of earlier writers, but he has only a very vague understanding of what they wrote, and he never considers the thoughts of the masters in this field, only those of the amateurs from whose mistakes there is very little to learn. And further, one really has to be a little more of a philosopher than Mr Carr even pretends to be in order to deal with this question intelligently. These defects might, however, have been forgiven if Mr Carr's book had pretended to be no more than the informal reflections of an historian about his craft. Some very good books of this sort have been written, notably by Marc Bloch and the Dutch historian John Huizinga. But Mr Carr is anxious to be more profound and ends up only being more pretentious.

It is now more than a century and a half ago that thinkers, mainly under the inspiration of Hegel, began seriously to consider the great theoretical problems entailed in any attempt to explain a course of events which represented human actions; the problem of *geisteswissenschaft*. Mr Carr has a dim recognition of the most obvious of these problems when he insists that the historian is himself within the course of events he is attempting to explain. But writers like Dilthey and Rickert (to say nothing of Hegel himself), whatever defects we may find in their views, far outdistance Mr Carr in their understanding of the problem, and he seems to be aware only of the residue left by their thoughts when they had percolated down to the level of vulgar misconception, as they have done the last fifty years. Mr Carr, in one of his less happy asides, briskly disposes of immensely significant exploration of the differences between 'scientific' and 'historical' enquiry, which has been at the centre of German philosophical thought for a century and a half, by saying that a disposition to look for such differences springs only from an eccentricity of the English language.

But let us begin where Mr Carr begins and where he says every historian must begin – not with 'past facts', but with the postulate he requires in order to determine which of these past facts are 'significant'. Mr Carr is unfortunately equivocal about this postulate. Sometimes he writes about it as if he understood it to be a genuine postulate, like what Rickert called the postulate of 'values'. It is said to reach the historian from the society in which he lives (or from his own particular situation in that society) and to condition the view he will take of the past times about which he writes. For Mr Carr the only rational postulate is 'the principle of progress', although he has to admit that this particular postulate is available only to those historians who have lived in societies in which this belief in progress has been current. From this we may conclude that only a 'rational' society (one that believes in progress) can generate a 'rational' account of the past (one that reflects a belief in progress); but perhaps this is what Mr Carr wishes us to conclude. But elsewhere Mr Carr writes of this postulate as if it were an hypothesis which the historian tests in a process called historical enquiry. And he says that nineteenth century British historians regarded the course of events as a demonstration of this principle of progress; that is, they found their hypothesis confirmed by their enquiries. But, if anything is certain, this postulate (which we are told an historian cannot do without) cannot be both a postulate given him by his society and used to determine the significance of events in the past, and an hypothesis which his enquiries might or might not confirm. Mr Carr must make up his mind.

Nor is this the only equivocation. Mr Carr spends many pages putting before us the conception of the historian's work as the mirror of the society in which he lives, leaving us in no doubt that he believes what Mommsen wrote about ancient Rome was conditioned by his situation in German society and can be understood only in this context. But, without notice, Mr Carr changes his view: the historian's situation in his own society is said not to be reflected in what he writes about the past but to be reflected in only *his choice of subject*. This, perhaps, is a more easily defensible view of the relation of the historian to his own time, but it is without significance in judging what an historian has written, and it still misses the only important point. What Mr Carr needs to understand, and what he shows no sign of understanding, is that the significant context of a piece of historical writing – what may be expected to tell us something important about it – is not its situation in the general history of mankind, or in the social position of the historian's own time, but its situation in the history of historiography.

Now, Mr Carr is undeniably correct when he says that no historian can begin with 'past facts,' and that what he needs is something to help him interpret those facts. But what the historian needs for this purpose is not a postulate, but hypotheses; and what he applies his hypotheses to is not (as Mr Carr thinks) 'past facts' but present facts – for the facts with which the historian has to deal at some stage or other in his enquiry are present and not past. Let us take these points separately.

When Mr Carr is dealing with the relation between historical and scientific enquiry, he makes a great deal of the view that both enquiries proceed by hypotheses, and this is the main reason he gives for believing that the two enquiries are of the same character. But what he neglects to observe is that all profitable hypothesis springs from the specific material being considered and must be in the idiom of the enquiry by means of which its confirmation or falsification is sought, and consequently historical and scientific hypotheses must be expected to have at least some significant differences.

Mommsen's hypotheses were about specific passages in Roman Republican history (not about history in general); Darwin's hypotheses were about biological change (not about the natural world in general); and what we look for from Mr Carr is some help in discriminating between historical and scientific hypotheses. But because he assumes that both enquiries proceed by means of hypotheses and that all hypotheses are of the same character he finds no occasion to explore the major question suggested by his theme, namely, What are the *peculiarities* of historical explanation?

And what are the 'facts' which an historian is called upon to consider and interpret? They are certainly not to be described as 'past facts'. What was Mr Carr trying to understand and interpret when he was composing his history of Soviet Russia? Surely it was writings and documents which were present, in front of him. What was he doing with these present facts? Surely he was reading them in order to find out what they could tell him about past happenings. He didn't take the statements they contained to be statements merely to be accepted. He had (among other things) to consider whether these statements were in fact true, and in order to decide this, he had to consider who had made them, and in what circumstances, because (unlike statements by historians) he knew for certain that they had not been made for the purpose of informing him about what happened. He had, then, to consider the significance of whatever truth they might contain. And he did this with the aid of hypotheses about what they might signify. And the result of it all was the construction, by Mr Carr of a story composed of 'significant', 'historical' events.

Yet, this is not at all the account Mr Carr gives in this book in which he discusses the question, What is History? Here, instead of observing what he had himself done when he was writing his *History*, he describes a purely imaginary situation in which an historian encounters 'past events' and is said to decide whether they are 'significant' events by considering whether they have a necessary or positive or important, or significant place in a postulated progressive, but as yet unterminated, course of world events.

Now, it is true that Mr Carr's *History of Soviet Russia* has some odd features, but they are not quite as odd as this. In that *History* he determines what are the significant events not by relating events to some postulated general progressive direction of events but by relating them to a direction of events in Russia which is revealed to him in what appears to be some kind of 'pre-historical' inspection of events. The historian, he appears to think, first looks over his material and discerns the general direction in which the events he is concerned with are moving; he then turns back to his material in earnest, and when events that offer themselves to him fail to find a significant place in this revealed direction of events he believes himself to have authority to reject or to neglect them. And in the book we are considering he defends this extraordinary procedure by a master stroke of irrelevance, namely by saying that the historian is concerned with what people did, not with what they might have done or what they failed to do. This is not history; it is only a politician's or moralist's retrospection. A politician might regard Trotsky's career as a dead-end when considered in relation to a desired direction of events and might wish on that account to forget him; and another politician might think the same thing about Stalin. But this merely marks the difference between a politician and an historian. The politician judges everything, past or present, in relation to his own purposes; from an historian we expect something different. But for Mr Carr the only difference is that the historian's context is a postulated good direction in which he supposes events are moving, and the politician's context is a direction which he merely wishes events to take.

Mr Carr devotes a whole chapter to what he calls Causation in History, and in it he gets himself thoroughly muddled about determinism in history. It is one of the many occasions when he asks what, even from his own point of view, is the wrong question. It would have been much more profitable if he had taken seriously his own proposition that history is what the historian makes and added to it the rider that the historian makes it in a process of *historical* thinking and *historical* enquiry, and had then asked himself the question: How illuminating are these concepts of cause and determinism when they are used to elucidate what the historian has made? But instead of doing this, he propounds the irrelevant and meaningless question: Is the notional course of events which the historian may be supposed to be exploring a causally determined course of events? His answer is that it is causally determined and that therefore the design of an historian must be to elucidate it in terms of causes and their effects. From a simple Positivist this would be an intelligible understanding of the situation; but from Mr Carr, who repeatedly rejects the image of historical enquiry as establishing connections between merely accepted 'facts', it is unintelligible. It would have been more interesting, and also more to the point, if Mr Carr had given us his views on the many writers who have tried to understand the world of historical events in terms other than the terms of cause and effect.

With a writer so continuously inadvertent as Mr Carr one is provoked to look for some method in the inadvertence; and I think there are two major premises of his thought which when they are brought to the surface explain a good deal.

First, it would appear that he believes that enquiry into events which are attributable to human actions and all writing about them is of a single kind and may therefore be read in the same manner. Here is Mommsen writing the history of Republican Rome. And Mr Carr tells us that the first thing we should ask about him is, What was his social position? What were his beliefs about current politics? because without answering these questions we shall be unable properly to understand what he says about ancient Rome. But these are exactly the questions which all critical historians ask about the authors of the *sources* they use in writing their history, and the questions which (absurdly) Mr Carr accuses them of often failing to ask. Now, historical writing is, precisely, writing about the past in which what has survived from the past is *not* accepted at its face value but is enquired into and criticized. It is writing about the past which is designed to make intelligible the past which is being written about. Consequently every piece of historical writing is eligible to be read in two different manners, both of which are legitimate but neither of which should be confused with the other. I may read Mommsen's writings in order to learn what his understanding of ancient Rome was, and when I do so the significant context of his writings is the history of the historiography of ancient Rome. On the other hand, if I am an historian of nineteenth century Germany, Mommsen's *History of Rome* may be one of my *sources*, and if this is so I shall read

Mommsen's history not as if it were history but obliquely, in the same manner as Mommsen himself read Livy or a Latin inscription; and reading it in this manner it may yield some interesting information about nineteenth century Germany. Now, what Mr Carr, in effect tells us, is that there is only one proper way in which to read the work of an historian, namely to read it as if we ourselves were historians of the time at which the historian wrote. In short, Mr Carr's view seems to be that there is no meaningful way of reading a piece of historical writing except as the source of some other history. And the only way of defending this view would seem to be by asserting it universally, that is, by applying it not only to historical writing but to science, to literature, to art and to every form of human utterance. And if this is done its absurdity is at once apparent: the sociology of knowledge cannot swallow up every other attitude towards knowledge without swallowing itself also, and nothing remains.

The second general belief is the conviction that there can be only one rational manner of regarding the past and interpreting what has happened, namely the manner in which we are accustomed to look at the past when we are engaged upon our ordinary practical affairs. In practical life we often refer to the past, asking questions designed to discover what has already happened. We ask, for example, When was this letter posted? or, Who gave you permission to do this? These questions are, of course, directly related to ourselves and our designs for action, and what we expect to get from the answers is an enhanced understanding of the present which in turn will give us our increased mastery over the present world. Now, for Mr Carr, this is precisely what the historian should be doing. He is enquiring into the past in order to provide an understanding of the present designed to make our current activities more effective. This is not an inherently absurd view of historical enquiry, but it entails the disappearance of any specifically 'historical' enquiry into the past and any specific 'historical' past. It only becomes inherently absurd when it is joined with Mr Carr's other assumption that all knowledge is the sociology of knowledge.

EDITORIAL NOTES

i LSE 1/1/29. Carbon copy. E.H. Carr, *What is History*, Macmillan and Co., London, and St. Martin's Press, New York, 1961.

Twenty-three

On Arriving at a University

This I fear may be the last straw.

You have been talked to by the Director, by the Registrar, by the Librarian, by your Tutors; you have been prematurely advised about your careers; you have been told where the lavatories are and what time the bar opens; you have been received, paraded, welcomed, registered and given a free tea. Some of you have attended a week-end party designed to prepare you for what is to come. You must be beginning to think that, after all, there may be something in being a student at a university. But the worst of all this for me is that I am left with nothing to say but what you've already heard, probably three times over.

However, I said I would talk to you; and the best thing I can do is try to entertain you for a few minutes by letting my imagination play round the experience of being a first-year undergraduate. And if what I have to say is not quite in line with what you've already been told, this will be a good experience for you. Here you will have to get used to being told different things by different people and having to make up your minds for yourselves.

But before I begin, let me say two things to you.

First, a great deal of the propaganda which has been directed upon you before you got here has been designed to make you believe that you are here to learn how to be a more efficient cog in a social machine. Forget it. You are here for nothing of the sort. You are here to educate yourselves, and education is not learning how to perform a social function. 'Society', no doubt, will make demands upon you soon enough, and you may find yourself (like the rest of us) a wretched cog in some vast machine which asks only that you perform what is called your function. But that is not what you have come here to learn; you have come here to get acquainted with truth and error, not with merely what is and what is not serviceable to a lunatic productivist society.

Secondly, almost everything that has happened to you since you arrived here, and much of what was told you beforehand, has tended to turn you into self-conscious 'Students', people with many rights, a few duties and a special status in society. Indeed, some people seem to think that being a 'student' is a sort of profession. Forget it.

You are certainly card-carrying members of something – but of what? The cards are certainly useful; they let you into special exhibitions at the Tate for half-price, and they give you the run of the Youth Hostels of Europe. But I hope you will not let them make you feel that you have joined something like a trade union. What the cards signify is that you are members of something much more like a confraternity of strolling players – to which I, also, am glad to belong. The police sometimes move us on; but we are tolerated, and to live in an area of toleration is much pleasanter than having a niche in society. Half the people in the world pray that they may be forgotten by the system that surrounds them; we are the happy few who are more nearly forgotten than anyone else. Let us enjoy it.

Students since the world began have been an unruly lot – noisy, irreverent, eccentric and irresponsible. For innumerable generations they have hitch-hiked about the world learning what they could and where they could. They are serious and light-hearted at the same time; having nothing but a few books, and a few half-baked ideas and a few tunes in their heads, sometimes rebellious, often uncomfortable, but on the way to acquiring what in the end, on their distant death-beds, they will recognize as one of the things most worth having: a mind and some thoughts of your own.

Although it is over forty years ago, I have never forgotten my first day at a university. Waking up on that first, brilliant October morning free, and with all the world in front of me. I felt like a newly liberated slave must have felt; or like one of those boys in the fairy-tale who pull on their boots, kiss their mothers goodbye and set out to seek their fortunes.

It was an unforgettable experience; and it needs only October and the beginning of a new University year to make me feel the excitement of it all over again. But each year I owe it also to you: when I look at you, each setting out to find your intellectual fortune, I am reminded of what it was like to be a first-year undergraduate – the release, the freedom, the expectancy in which there was no fear of disappointment.

But if I were to pay attention to what I read in the newspapers – a very unwise thing to do; journalists have a happy knack of getting everything just wrong – I should almost believe that you are worried rather than elated, depressed rather than excited, anxious rather than expectant. A student was even reported the other day to have used the expression 'the terrifying freedom of a university'. I wondered what he could have been thinking of. And sixth-formers have, I am told, banded themselves together into a mutual protection society. It's all very surprising. I suppose a newly liberated slave does feel a bit bewildered. But, believe me, a university isn't as bad as all that. Indeed, I have a piece of good news for you, which the others may have forgotten to tell you: you are actually meant to enjoy yourselves here.

What is there to be enjoyed?

Being at a university is, in the first place, a merciful postponement of having to take up the often dreary responsibilities of an adult. Schooldays and the frustrations of childhood are behind you; but you are not yet adults and (though it is hoped you will behave in a more or less civilized manner) you are not expected to be adults. What you have got is an interval between childhood and what the poet has called 'the long littleness of life'. It's magic. A reprieve for three years from the 'rat race', from 'the deadliness of doing', as the hymn says.

Some people would call it a privilege. I wouldn't, because I think what is talked about privileges is mostly nonsense. At all events, you had better not waste time being grateful to the tax-payer or anyone else for it. Take it as an aristocrat takes his position – not as a right, nor as a burden, but as what belongs to him by good fortune. You are lucky, and you are here to enjoy your good luck as Pope Pius II on his election said he intended to enjoy the Papacy.

The Greeks had a word for what there is to be enjoyed in a university: they called it σχολη, which we translate 'leisure'. But it is a lame translation. For them σχολη meant not only freedom from household chores (not having to do the washing up) and freedom from having to earn a living; it meant, also, freedom from having to take that attitude towards the world in which it is regarded merely as material for satisfying human wants. 'Leisure', which they connected with being at 'School', was having none of these practical and utilitarian distractions, and consequently being free to think, free to contemplate, free to converse and exchange ideas. Free, indeed, to be a little crazy about ideas.

Now, it is this 'leisure' which three years at a university offers you. It is something very different from doing nothing; but it is also something very different from participating in the great enterprise of extracting from the world satisfactions for our wants and contributing to that blessed 4% per annum increase in productivity.

No doubt there will come a time when you will find yourselves with your noses to the grindstone, part of the great productive enterprise of satisfying the wants which you would never have had unless you had been told about them. Because, of course, this interval will come to an end. Meanwhile, however, you can forget it: at a university you do not have to do any of these things. This 'leisure', this disengagement, ought to be the easiest thing in the world to manage. It may, perhaps, be unfamiliar, but there is certainly nothing to be anxious about. It will be time enough for you to be anxious when you have five children, a job at the Board of Trade and an enormous hire-purchase debt.

What does it matter if you don't know exactly what to expect here, or how to spend your time, or whether you shall read six hours a day or eight? That's what you're here to find out, and nobody expects you to find it out all at once. These things aren't *problems* to be anxiously pondered. They're much more like wondering whether to kiss the girl. If you've been well brought-up you can't go far wrong if you do what you feel inclined to do; and if you are left puzzled – well, take your time, look around. The great thing about undergraduate life is that there is no desperate urgency about anything; and you can make a good many mistakes without having to pay very much for them. The only general principle I know – and that is not always true – is that one regrets less the things one does than the things one does not do.

What opens before you, then, is not a road which you have got to tread carefully, always keeping to the middle, but a boundless sea; and all you have to do is spread your sails to the wind. You are not here just to get a degree – that is a by-product. Nor are you here to 'follow a course'. A university is a place where you educate yourselves and educate one another, and that is what you are here to do.

Not long ago, a girl at an Oxford college got into fearful trouble because, when she was asked by the Principal of her college what she had come to Oxford for, she answered: 'I've come for the life'. You can see it all, can't you? 'And why, Shirley, have *you* come to the University?' 'Oh, for the life; the life's the thing, madam.' And yet, although she got a black mark, and was sent to the bottom of the class for this reply, the poor girl was really quite right – or may have been. The life *is* the thing; this magic, fully occupied but 'leisured' life; you'll never get the chance of it again.

But let me tell you a little more about life at a university. About one-third of it is spent in sleep; this is regrettable, but unavoidable for human beings. Horses need less sleep and cows none at all. Of the remaining two-thirds a large part is taken up with activities such as playing the flute, sitting with your feet up in the common-room reading 'Lady Chatterly', or whatever the current craze is, and arguing among yourselves. None of this is regrettable; it is what you should be doing.

But there's something else that belongs to life in a university. The inventors of it (whoever they were) seem to have thought that it is a good thing, even for people who are going to spend their lives in practical occupations of one sort or another and in judging the utilities of things, to get acquainted with what may be called the 'academic' attitude to things. It is a peculiar attitude, the interest and value of which does not depend upon its immediate usefulness in practical life; indeed, it can be said to have no more than an oblique bearing upon practical life. And since you are here to get acquainted with it, I had better say a word about it.

It is often thought that the word 'academic' stands for something pretty remote from practical affairs of any kind; and so, indeed, it does. But that is merely one of its negative characteristics. The positive side of being 'academic' is being concerned, not with prescriptions and injunctions, not with learning what to do and how to do it, not with discovering merely how things work and what they can be used for, but with *explanations*. And perhaps you can see at once how, to be concerned with understanding and explaining, and to enjoy 'leisure', are only two ways of saying the same thing. 'Leisure', here, is precisely, being free to give your attention to understanding and explaining because you are undistracted by the necessity of doing anything or learning how to do anything.

For the 'doer' (and most of us, for most of our lives, are condemned to be 'doers') the world is material to be made use of, it is something to impose our own purposes and designs upon, it is something to be conquered and exploited. But to the 'explainer', to the 'academic', the world is something very different from this. It is something to be understood, not used; something to be discerned and made intelligible, not exploited. He is concerned to see the world as it is, not to take from it what will satisfy some want or other.

This, you may think, is a very odd attitude to take to the world; but for better or worse, this is the 'academic' attitude. And you have come here to spend a few years getting acquainted with this peculiar 'academic' enterprise of understanding and explaining things.

Now, you have chosen to give your academic attention while you are here to the set of studies which comprise the B.Sc. (Economics). These studies are sometimes called the 'social sciences'; but this is a very high-faluting expression which means next to nothing and you had better not pay too much attention to it. What in fact you will be concerned with is different kinds of explanation of human conduct. These different explanations do not conflict with one another; none of them is fixed or finished; each is a manner of explaining human conduct which is in process of being explored.

The three central studies you will be concerned with in your first year are Economics, History and Politics. And each of these should be understood as an attempt to explain human conduct.

Economics is trying to explain human conduct when human beings are in the position of having to make a choice between different courses of action. It does not tell you what to do; it gives you an explanation of what may be supposed to go on when you are in the position of having to make a choice. Oh, I know that, in these days, economists spend half their time telling the Chancellor of the Exchequer what to do.

But don't be misled. Like the rest of us they have their opinions and sometimes they are wise; but economics itself is not knowing what to do – it is giving an explanation of a situation, it is exploring a world of explanatory, not practical, ideas.

History is another sort of explanation of human conduct. It doesn't tell you what to do; it merely makes intelligible, or explains, in a manner peculiar to itself, what human beings from time to time have done and the events which have followed from their actions.

Politics, on the face of it, looks like being the odd man out in all this, because the word 'politics' usually stands for *doing things*, wanting to do things, and knowing how to do things. But here, in a university, we mean something else. We are not concerned with recommending political beliefs of any sort to you, nor do we design to prepare you to participate in public affairs. 'Politics' is understood to be a certain sort of human activity – the activity of governing and being governed – and we are concerned with explaining it. To study politics here is simply a good opportunity to explore and to become familiar with a number of different ways of explaining human conduct – historical, legal, psychological and philosophical explanations.

You are at 'leisure', then, in a university because you are concerned with understanding and explaining things and not with doing things or merely finding out how things work. You are concerned with trying to understand the qualities and characteristics of different sorts of explanation and not with trying to decide (or gather information for deciding) what is the best thing to do or how the world may be used most profitably.

But, a university is not a factory which turns out neat little explanations, all in perfect working order and guaranteed for twelve months. Nor is it a shop: we have nothing ready-made to sell you over the counter. What we can do is talk to you, listen to what you have to say, to tell you some of the books you ought to be reading, and to read and criticize what you write – the rest you must do for yourselves. There is no telling where you may find your intellectual fortune; it may come in a lecture, or in a book – more likely in a book.

But you will have to read a great many books of a great many different sorts if you are to recognize it when it appears.

If you pick up some information while you are here you will have done nothing you ought not to have done. Information is useful stuff. But you are not here primarily to gather information. You are here to get some practice in thinking – not just thinking in no manner in particular, (like Belloc's orchestra played no music in particular) but in thinking in the way in which an economist or an historian or a mathematician or philosopher thinks. And you are here to get some practice in expressing your thoughts.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[i] LSE 1/1/39. Typescript with autograph corrections. Three press cuttings are contained in the same file, one of which appears to be dated 1961.

Twenty-four

The Historiography of Max Lenz

German historiography in the nineteenth century, so far as it is concerned with modern times, has commonly been thought to fall into three main periods, in each of which a group of historians displayed a characteristic interest and point of view. The first group, dominated by Ranke, was concerned with the international history of modern times and was distinguished by a 'European' detachment from nationalistic, and a 'secular' detachment from theological, interests. The second, typified by Treitschke, concerned themselves with the domestic history of the German nation, and their point of view was propagandist; they were the 'artists of the Prussian Mission'. The third group, whose progenitor was Max Lenz, looked back over the heads of their immediate predecessors to Ranke and acquired the name of *Neurankeaner*. They were concerned, mainly, with the historic place of Germany among the Great Powers. Mr Herkless's enquiry is into the exact intellectual relationship between Lenz and Ranke.

He is not the first to tackle this problem, but he is dissatisfied with the conclusions of his predecessors. Dehio (1955) took the view that the only tie between Lenz and Ranke was their common interest in international history and that otherwise Lenz was a 'nationalist' concerned to do for the second Reich what Treitschke had done for Prussia. This Mr Herkless believes to be mistaken. And Krill (1962) held that what Lenz owed to Ranke was a broad 'secularist' and 'European' point of view and nothing more. This Mr Herkless believes to be a grossly oversimplified view.

His own conclusion is that the intellectual relationship between Lenz and Ranke was exceedingly complicated, and that Lenz himself saw clearly both what his debt to Ranke was and how he could go beyond his master while acknowledging it. Briefly the thesis is as follows.

Ranke's 'European' *Anschauung* was both an escape from the vague 'cosmopolitanism' of the eighteenth century into what he regarded as the real world of the emergent states of modern Europe, and an escape from the incoherence of merely domestic history. He understood the foreign policy of a state to be a reflection of its domestic conditions, but he believed that these conditions were, largely, an indecipherable confusion which became intelligible (or 'rational') only when they were focussed in a foreign policy; and that, therefore, it should be with this that a 'scientific' historian should concern himself. The 'balance of power' appeared to Ranke to be a 'rational' principle in terms of which modern European history became intelligible.

In most of this (and much else) Lenz was a follower of Ranke. But (in respect of Germany) he believed himself to be in a situation (which Ranke believed to be inherently impossible, and not merely circumstantially difficult) in which 'domestic' history could be made to tell a 'rational' story; and this belief led him to seek the intelligible principle of modern German domestic history. He found it in the unresolved tension between secular and religious authority: a state which circumstances obliged both to recognize and oppose a Church's claim to independence. He understood the Reformation to be the proto-occurrence of this tension; but, in ever-changing forms, it had characterised the whole of modern history, the *Kulturkampf* being its latest appearance. Lenz added to this the belief that each of the components of this tension had, in the course of modern times, become more 'rational' – the 'secular' generating the 'liberal' state of the nineteenth century, and the 'religious' becoming less 'ecclesiastical' and more to be identified with the feeling for the moral autonomy of the individual. It is with this over-all view of the domestic history of modern European states (and particularly of Germany) in mind that Lenz pursued, in a Rankeian manner, the history of the relations between modern European states.

Mr Herkless argues his thesis with energy and intelligence. He makes fine distinctions where his predecessors were satisfied with rough approximations, and on most occasions he is able to carry his reader with him. He is knowledgeable, and it does not appear to be all in the shop-window. He takes some risks, he is not always fully in control, but he manages to keep afloat. Within its relatively narrow compass he has written an interesting essay. There is nothing brilliant to lift it far out of the common run of work of its kind, but it leaves a generally favourable impression. Considerably tightened up, it would make an interesting article for an historical journal.

There is, however, one serious qualification to be made. Most of the writings Mr Herkless is concerned with are German; it is in this language he must have read them, and their quantity is large. But when he translates passages from Lenz (the originals of which he gives in footnotes), his versions are not only sadly pedestrian but often contain such grotesque errors that one wonders what reliance can be placed upon his understanding of anything he has read in the language.

His translation (pp. 19 and 49) of the 'key sentence' which is said to contain the 'crux of Lenz's thought' about the principle running through modern European history (*die Stellung der Weltlichen Macht zur Kirche, der Begriff selbst, der deren Ansprüche begründet, und das Recht des Staates, der ihr entgegentritt.*), if it is allowed to have any meaning at all, means the opposite of what Lenz wrote; although, surprisingly enough, in his commentary Mr Herkless *seems* to understand it as it should be understood. Another passage translated on p. 50, besides ineptitudes, has two important mistakes. The German (in the footnote) of the passage translated on p. 52 seems to be defective, and *Rücksicht* is translated 'looking back'. And this is not the end.

It is very puzzling, and suggests that Mr Herkless has tried to do something for which he is incompletely equipped – which, perhaps, makes the amount he has got through, and the intelligibility of what he has himself to say, all the more remarkable.

EDITORIAL NOTES

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Twenty-five

The Emergence of the History of Thought

1. From one point of view, what is known as the 'history of thought', the 'history of ideas', 'intellectual history' (or more widely) as *Kulturgeschichte* or *Geistesgeschichte* may be understood as a sub-species of historical enquiry – the kind of historical investigation which is concerned with beliefs and doctrines expressed in words rather than deeds, with arguments rather than with actions, with literature and with art. This direction of attention may be difficult to establish and the distinctions it entails may be uneasy, but, taking this general point of view, one might try to discern the mediations of its emergence in the general enterprise of historical understanding. For there is little doubt that it is a late-comer in the world of historical discourse.

This, however, is not the point of view I propose to take here. I want to consider something that lies to one side of it; namely, the emergence of a concern to establish and to explore a past relationship for a present understood in terms of intellectual engagement and achievement. I want to consider, in the first place, not the emergence within the world of historical discourse of a particular focus of attention, but the fortunes of the undertaking to evoke or construct a legendary intellectual past. And this is important because the 'history of thought' is not only the latest-born of that mode of understanding we call 'historical' but also the step-child of an intellectual legend-making enterprise.

2. There is a recourse to past which may be recognized as an endeavour to identify oneself or to confirm one's identity. And by a man's 'identity' I do not mean what is vulgarly called his 'image' (that is, what he may wish his con-

temporaries to think of him), I mean his self-recognition or self-understanding. This is rarely a simple condition; rather, it is a fluctuating balance of not always compatible dispositions, sympathies, attachments, loyalties, wants, purposes, devotions etc., some of which he may share with others, any of which may temporarily become the dominant consideration in self-understanding, and in terms of which a man responds to the emergent situations which constitute his life. That is, human self-recognition is something that has to be learned, and what is learned is not merely a relationship between self and others but a relationship between present and past. Indeed, to have evoked a past, perhaps in part shared with others but recognized as one's own, is the condition of all human self-consciousness.

There are, of course, other purported manners of self-identification; for example, in terms of a name and an address. But this alone, however far it is extended, hardly constitutes a self-recognition; it is scarcely more than a useful label. To identify oneself *vis à vis* the 'natural' world, like Lucretius to recognize oneself as an example of the operation of natural forces, or in relation to a process such as that of organic evolution, is, by itself, dreadfully uninformative and is indeed self-contradictory: it denies (or at least neglects) the self to be recognized, the self capable of discovering and understanding the processes concerned. So called species-being is utterly insignificant: even at this level, it is not membership of a species but being aware of a somewhat exclusive human lineage which endows a man with a distinct biological identity. And although a religious identity (understanding oneself in relation to God), or being aware of oneself in terms of a skill or profession, or recognizing oneself in terms of a current moral or prudential order or of an imagined and wished for future condition of things, may each be important ingredients of a self-understanding, each is the evocation of a past-relationship. The terms of human self-recognition are not a faculty of reasoning and of speech but the enjoyment of a language and a literature. *Humanitas* is not the consciousness of sharing a common so-called 'human nature', it is being aware of belonging to a present of understandings, engagements, achievements and relationships which stretches back into a past. To be aware of this past and to cultivate this awareness constitutes the education which endows us with an identity.

Nevertheless, a past of this kind, one in which we seek a reflection of ourselves and in terms of which we may come to understand ourselves, is not a gift. It is an evoked past, a work of art, a legend of past which has to be created, learned, cared for and cultivated. And to call it a 'legendary' past is to distinguish, not to denigrate it. It is a past constituted in interested recollection, an imagined, not a fancied, past. What is to be noticed is its general design and usual content.

In respect of design, it is a past from which all that is casual, inconsequent, secondary, truncated, obscure, irrelevant or of uncertain significance is absent. Its components are symbolic occurrences. The events of which it is composed are simple, and each is given a single, unambiguous meaning. There is clear outline, there is pattern and there is unity of feeling. Persons, although they may have proper names, are emblems – 'authors' or originators or progenitors, and if not in some respect heroic, then at least symbolic. So far as persons are concerned it is hagiography or demonology, it concerns friends or enemies; in respect of beliefs it is doxological. The intelligibility and the value of this past lies in the messages it delivers, the lessons it teaches and the authority and confidence it gives to current engagements. Its virtue is to endow persons and associations of persons with an unequivocal lineage and character and thus to make them at home in an otherwise mysterious and menacing universe.

In respect of its usual content, it is comprised of occurrences, of the deeds and sufferings of those who are recognized as, in some sense, our forebears; their engagements, their achievements, their shortcomings and their failures. This is the ordinary focus of attention. A concern with what they thought, with ideas and beliefs, is secondary and appears only in an occasional concern with the motives of actions, the designs of undertakings and the ideal purposes imagined and pursued. The utterances of men in this past are concerned with conduct. This is the design and character of the past in saga and legend. It may be contracted into a single overwhelming event, the foundation of a family or an institution, the purported beginning of a new and unfinished adventure, the suffering of what is represented to have been a great wrong (like the Norman Conquest of England) or an emancipation from a great servitude (the escape from Egypt); or it may be spread out as a story of many related happenings.

The epic story of the past in which an individual or an association of individuals identifies itself is, then, a story composed of happenings. And this is so even where we might expect it not to be so; for example, in the pasts evoked by religious associations. These pasts are often not without reference to creeds, although beliefs usually appear as dogmas. But, for the most part, they are filled with actions, with triumphs and defeats, victories and adversities, with the lives and deeds of founders, of saints and martyrs, prophets and sages; with rituals faithfully performed, anniversaries, festivals, holy days, feasts and fasts inaugurated and punctually observed; with blessings enjoyed and calamities endured. Even in those religions (like the ancient Hebrew religion, Christianity and the Moslem religion) which have a large ingredient of theology, it is a past in which *fas*, what ought to be done, predominates over what should be believed. The past of Christians is composed of the cosmic event which encapsulates the relationship of God to human beings, of the momentous occurrences of early days and with the lives, the deeds and the sayings of Christian heroes and sages. Even the simple evangelical self-identification, 'I belong to Christ', is an assertion of a relationship to past events. And further, even where the 'present' concerned is almost unequivocally that of an intellectual enquiry, as in the case of modern physics, the past it evoked in order to identify itself was not, in the first place, composed of understood intellectual achievements but was an epic of 'discoveries', of the foundation of associations and academies and of dramatic confrontations. Galileo and Giordano Bruno appear first as martyrs the exact tenor of whose intellectual engagements, let alone achievements, is left obscure. They are athenasian characters.

It was stories of past deeds and sufferings, epics of doings and happenings, which were unfolded by those who have endowed their fellows with an understanding of themselves; Herodotus and Livy, the historiographers of the ancient Hebrews, the authors of the sagas of the north, the early legend-makers of the inhabitants of England, Geoffrey of Monmouth and his fellows whose task, among other things, it was to give Britain an identity by relating how it emerged from Albion. It is a lineage of performances and performative utterances, not a pedigree of ideas, which is revealed in Machiavelli's *History of Florence*, in de Seyssel's *La grant Monarchie de France*, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, Camden's *Britannia*, Milton's *History of England*, Neal's *History of the Puritans*, Raleigh's *History of the World*. Vasari's *Lives of the Painters* is not the story of imaginative adventures but of the circumstances of the lives and accomplishments of Italian artists. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* is a record of Christian evangelism, not of religious experience or theological speculation; its model is Livy not the Book of Job. Sprat's *History of the Royal Society* is a story of doings, of the circumstantial encounters of enquirers in which they lay before one another their 'finds'. And even those who have sought to recognize a contemporary scene in a 'universal' context have, for the most part, evoked a past which is an epic of the rise and fall of 'empires', of successive 'ages' marked by prodigious happenings and events intimating what was to come. The understanding of ourselves offered us in the writings of Karl Marx, no less than that presented in Otto of Freising's *Chronicle of the Two Cities* or in the writings of Joachim of Fiore, is in terms of a past composed of symbolic events.

All this is commonplace. And what it indicates is that the attention of most people (their 'natural' present, so to say) is focused upon where in the world they are located, upon what they are doing and upon the imagined outcome of their choices and actions. So when they turn to the past to enhance their self-awareness, to confirm their sense of their own identity and to fortify themselves in their undertakings, it is to be expected that they should evoke a past which exhibits the same focus of attention; that is, a story which will tell them how they came to be where they are and to be doing what they are doing. We accommodate ourselves to death, not by 'understanding' it, but in the recollection that other and better men have passed that way. Xerxes did die, And so must I.

Or, it might be said that it is among agents in respect of doing or in seeking consolation or 'meaning' in what they have to suffer, explorers in making discoveries, rulers in seeking authority to rule, subjects vindicating their liberties to act, exiles accommodating themselves to their displacement, owners defending their property, lawyers seeking precedents for their conclusions, pious men subscribing to practices, innovators defending their deviations of conduct (rather than believers engaged in believing or thinkers in respect of their enquiries) that the need for the self-understanding which a past-relationship promotes is most immediately and most urgently felt. We are, in the first place, doers and sufferers and as such we are only squatters in the world; and the self-understanding we seek is that in which the merely 'factual' character of our locations, our performances and our tribulations is redeemed by putting them into a story. And conversely, a man seriously or fancifully dissatisfied with what he understands himself to be may seek a different identity, but only by connecting himself with a different circumstantial past – as some of Flora Thompson's villagers invented aristocratic pedigrees for themselves. Or, a highly self-conscious and self-approbating people, one convinced both of the novelty and inherent rectitude of their current engagements, may disown and seek to forget or to obliterate burdensome ties with a past composed of the messageful deeds, engagements and failures of its forebears – as those who confidently identified themselves as 'the elect of God' in seventeenth century England proposed to destroy, not their Bibles, but the records in the Tower of London. But here again, on most such occasions, what is effected is achieved not by expunging all past-awareness but by the replacement of one eventful legend of the past by another.

3. This being so, there would seem to be some oddity in an enterprise to evoke a past composed of thoughts, beliefs, ideas, arguments, enquiries etc., to construct (so to say) an intellectual legend as a celebration or a confirmation of a man's or an association's sense of identity. First, it does not seem to be so urgent. A performance cannot be redeemed in the success of its achieving its wished-for outcome, for this outcome is no less merely 'factual' than the deed itself unless it is otherwise redeemed, and a tribulation cries out for an extrinsic 'meaning', but a belief (or at least some beliefs) may claim such redemption in being found to be persuasive or in being demonstrated to be 'true.' Beliefs, arguments, intellectual enquiries etc., or even sentiments, seem not to require

(or not so urgently to require) to be put into a story in order to be understood or to become acceptable; they are self-sustaining or self-defeating in a way in which actions are not. And secondly, while we may easily recognize that a man's beliefs (whatever they may concern) are important to him, we cannot so readily understand that he should so exclusively identify himself with them as to be at a loss to know who he is without evoking a past of beliefs in terms of which to understand himself. In what circumstances, then, might this somewhat unlikely enterprise be undertaken? This question is, perhaps, best answered by considering two occasions when it was undertaken.

In Book I of the *Physics* Aristotle gives some account of the ideas of his predecessors. That he thinks most of these ideas were mistaken does not matter now; we will come to that consideration later. The important point is that this past, evoked by Aristotle, is composed of the ideas of those only whom he understood to be his intellectual forebears; that is, those whom he recognized to be concerned with the same intellectual adventures as himself. And he uses those ideas (erroneous though they may have been) as a means of identifying his own engagement, which thus becomes a passage in an enquiry which he did not begin and will not end. That this is not a 'history of ideas' is of no consequence at all: it is not intended to be. What matters is what it is. And it may be recognized as Aristotle locating himself, identifying himself and his own enterprise by evoking an intellectual past, an epic of physical speculation, to which he as a physicist claims to belong.

The work of Diogenes Laertius called *The Lives of the Philosophers* has a somewhat different pattern, but it is of the same general character. It is the work of an intellectual patriot whose enterprise is to give Hellas a heightened sense of intellectual self-consciousness and philosophical identity by celebrating the achievements of its philosophers. Of course, it contains anecdotes about the conduct of these philosophers and accounts of their travels about the world; there are records of births and deaths and of the foundation of Schools and Academies. But Diogenes is himself a philosopher; the focus of his own attention (his 'natural' present) is upon ideas and arguments, and the past he evokes is accordingly centred upon ideas, their lineage, the terms in which they are formulated and their fortunes. Nobody could mistake *The Lives of the Philosophers* for a 'history' of Greek philosophy or for a chronicle of local happenings. It is a loosely constructed legend of Greek philosophical reflection; no less an expression of pride in the intellectual achievements of Hellas than Livy's *History* is an expression of pride in the civil and martial exploits of the *populus Romanus*.

Here, then, is an indication of the sort of circumstances in which a past-awareness concerned with present self-understanding might become focused upon beliefs and ideas rather than upon actions and performative utterances. What is desiderated is a 'natural' present recognized to be composed of beliefs, ideas, intellectual enquiries etc., which will appropriately evoke a past of similar composition in order to confirm its own identity and to fortify its current engagements.

This situation will most readily emerge when the present in search of a past-relationship is a specific intellectual engagement. Philosophers, if they turn to the past, will seek one which they can recognize as their own. The past which a theologian needs in order to know himself as a theologian is a past composed of thoughts, enquiries and speculations about God or 'things divine.' A mathematician will seek his lineage among mathematicians, an artist among artists, a lawyer among lawyers. And such a past may be somewhat exclusive, like that of a latter-day Platonist or Cartesian who identifies himself in relation to a familial intellectual past; or it may be one composed of a variety of beliefs and directions of enquiry, some of which he may regard as mistaken but all of which have messages for him.

But there is no need to suppose that this urge to evoke an intellectual past must be confined to such narrowly specified situations. And were it to happen that, by some turn of circumstances, a man or a whole generation of associates appeared disposed to self-recognition in what may generally be called intellectual terms, then it may be expected that such persons will seek the confirmation of their identity in a past of a corresponding character, a legendary intellectual past. The scale and magnitude of this past in the service of intellectual self-consciousness will, of course, correspond to the scale and magnitude of current intellectual engagements. It may be a past which seems to authorize the pursuit of certain directions of enquiry, which connives at the indulgence of certain sentiments or sanctions the exploration of some experiences and restrains that of others. And it may be a predominantly minatory past in whose messages warnings occupy the chief place or (more likely) one in which release and restraint are mixed. No doubt its design will be somewhat more complicated that that of a past composed of messageful happenings and performances, but its general character will not be notably different.

4. Now, it so happens that one of the most remarkable features of what is called 'modern' Europe was the emergence of persons and associations of persons who devoted an unusual amount of energy to intellectual enterprise, who gave first place to their intellectual engagements and took great pride in their intellectual achievements: persons who identified themselves in terms of their beliefs, of general ideas about the world and themselves rather than practical undertakings, of their sentiments rather than their actions, of poetic utterances rather than notable deeds, of their curiosity about what they did not understand rather than their use of what they did, of their intellectual engagements rather than their information – persons, in short, acutely aware of deserting a well-trodden track, of being embarked upon new intellectual adventures, enticed by vernal sentiments and of being invited by the prospect of novel experiences.

I do not, of course, mean that such persons are unique to modern Europe. Nor am I suggesting that this idiom of self-understanding ever displaced more ordinary forms of self-identification (domestic or imperial), or that it did not encounter other new or revived forms of self-awareness, or that it was the concern of more than a relatively small proportion of the inhabitants of modern Europe. What Lord Acton called 'the reign of general ideas' never established itself without competitors in either the religious or the political self-understanding of European peoples. Self-awareness in terms of technological engagement and achievement has been a notable feature of modern times which spilt over into our early identifications of distant ages of mankind – the 'stone' and the 'iron' ages. Both biological enquiry and astronomical speculation have, for some, renewed a concern with self-identification in terms of what is called 'man's place in nature.' Faust and Don Juan are powerful images of the human engagement (gold and girls) which point in another direction. But whatever the qualifications, a present of moral and intellectual adventure seeking to identify itself, to confirm its self-understanding and to give buoyancy to its engagements in terms of a corresponding past-awareness has been a prominent feature of modern European life.

We are concerned, then, with what (on any reading of it) is itself one of the most notable of the intellectual enterprises of modern Europe; the undertaking of persons and associations of persons whose self-understanding was predominantly in terms of beliefs, ideas and intellectual adventures to extend and to confirm this self-understanding by putting it into a story. This attempt to link a present intellectual experience with an appropriate or 'matching' past was not remarkable for its uniformity. In the course of time, not one, but at least three major (as well as some minor) intellectual legends of modern Europe emerged. None of these evoked pasts was exclusively composed of beliefs and intellectual adventures, deeds hardly less than thoughts and arguments had a place in it, but they are important to us because they both directly nurtured and obliquely hindered the emergence of a genuinely historical concern with the intellectual past. None was a sudden emergence; none was at any time recognized as *the* intellectual legend of modern Europe or was ever able to silence the many other pasts in terms of which modern European peoples have from time to time sought self-understanding; and while each has enjoyed a period of fashionable acceptance, none has perished beyond recall.

5. (1) The first substantial version of the intellectual legend of modern Europe was the work of fifteenth-century 'humanists'. These, however, were the beneficiaries of a slowly accumulated intellectual estate whose resources had already been cultivated in response to the urgencies of intellectual demands which had their springs elsewhere. They not only reaped where others had sown, but ministered to wants they had not created. For, 'modernity', and what from this point of view may be called 'modern' Europe, is a tumult of emotional and intellectual activity which emerged unevenly and indistinctly from the recesses of the culture of twelfth-century Christendom; a fledgling *vita nuova*, hatched by the

warmth of circumstances, broke the shell and spread its wings in flight. It came to embrace every department of human concern. It expressed itself not only in modish novelties of conduct, in flamboyant self-assertions, extravagant heresies, random rejections and profligate elopements and in transitory intellectual escapades, but also in ardent attachments to excellence, in the recognition and admiration of distinction and independence, in adventurous human relationships seriously explored, in a new consideration for and delight in the evanescence, the contingency and the variety of the world, in sustained intellectual engagements and in imaginative magnificence. And it precipitated a new reading of the human condition, a probationary self-understanding which sought confidence for its truancies in an attachment to a past. And the past evoked and used to locate, to give shape to, to identify and to sustain this new style of self-understanding, the recognition of its counterpart (rather than its roots) in 'antiquity', was itself the transformation of a relationship between present and past which had never been forgotten even by those who had sought to play down its significance. [ii]

The 'humanists' of the time were men who had come to recognize themselves in terms of their own intellectual enterprises and achievements; this was the predominant character of their 'natural' present. These enterprises were not confined to one or a few departments of reflective enquiry; they embraced the entire range of the *studia*, or intellectual pursuits, with which current European civilization acquainted them; philosophy, logic, theology, ethics, mathematics, law, politics, language, literature, art, music and the sciences of the natural world.

Moreover, they had a supreme incentive for making a connection between themselves and an intellectual past. They believed that from one bit of the intellectual past of Europe (called, in general, 'Antiquity') they could acquire all the knowledge they sought in all their current enquiries. This specific intellectual past was understood to be the unclouded spring of true understanding; and profitable intellectual enterprise was identified with a return *ad fontem*. 'Antiquity' was recognized as a 'living' past, as their own past, and as the authority to which current intellectual enterprise must submit. In these circumstances, the pursuits of the humanists were inseverably connected with a particular past of intellectual achievement; and the 'humanist' was not merely *apt* to understand himself in terms of this connection; he felt himself *obliged* to do so.

And the intellectual legend of modern Europe which emerged from this situation was one in which 'Antiquity' appeared as a dazzling world of intellectual achievements, and one in which the centuries which intervened between the present and this illuminated past were recognized as an age of darkness, ignorance and intellectual corruption the relics of which must be swept away if the human race was to tread once more the path of truth. Thus, the 'humanist', identifying himself in the terms of this legend, understood his destiny to be that of clearing the ground encumbered by the rubble of collapsed mediaeval intellectual constructions in preparation for a new age of antiquated enlightenment: by disposition he was devout, by circumstance he was engaged in a work of demolition.

This first version of the intellectual legend of modern Europe did not, as a whole, last very long. Parts of it survived and are still with us, having been built into later versions. And, occasionally, in later times, the 'humanist' disposition has, briefly, enjoyed a new lease of life: we may, perhaps, see it exhibited in the nineteenth century Pre-Raphaelite school of painters who identified themselves in relation to the achievements of Italian painting before it was corrupted by Raphael, regarding these achievements as the authority for their current style of painting and regarding what intervened between themselves and this past as, for the most part, dross.

But, during the seventeenth century the 'humanist' legend had to defend itself in the greatest intellectual controversy of modern times – the so-called controversy of the 'Ancients and the Moderns' – which was the matrix of a new intellectual legend of modern Europe. It was also outflanked by the 'new learning' which the enquiries of the 'humanists' had themselves provoked and by the emergence of a genuinely historical study in which 'Classical Antiquity' became more interesting but lost some of its authority.

The Protestant Reformers were, in the first place, concerned with the government and the institutions of the mediaeval church, and only gradually came to recognize themselves in terms of religious beliefs and theological doctrines. But when they did so, they constructed a legend of Christian belief of the same general design as the legend of the intellectual past of the 'humanists.' Here, the authoritative past was that of the New Testament, and what intervened between the Reformers and primitive Christian belief was recognized as a dark age of more and more elaborate heresy, the work of corrupt post-Augustinian theologians in league with designing Popes, comparable to the work of the mediaeval glossators of Roman Law. The New Testament was, for them, a 'living' past, their own past; and they found in it the *authority* for the beliefs they had come to hold. Luther called St Paul's *Epistle to the Galatians*, 'My Galatians'; the early Reformers and the later Puritans were essentially 'learned' men, and submission to the Scriptures was the counterpart of the 'humanist' submission to the latinity of Cicero or to the theology of Plato's *Timaeus*. And just as, in the course of the seventeenth century the *worship* of Antiquity came to be regarded as a superstition, so Selden was able to say that the phrase '*Scrutamini scripturas*' had 'undone the world.'

(2) The second version of the intellectual legend of modern Europe, if it was not actually invented by Francis Bacon, may at least be called the Baconian version.

The intellectual present to which this version of the intellectual past was the response was that of a generation so completely absorbed in the absolute novelty and fruitfulness of its own methods of inquiry, so eager to harvest the crops of knowledge it had sown unaided in virgin soil, and so confident of the yield, that an impulse to make connection with an intellectual past was almost wholly absent. So new and so rich a vein had been struck that the confidence to explore it needed no support from an appreciation of the activities of those in the past who could not be supposed to have done anything more than scratch about on the surface. And certainly there was no past which could be thought of as supplying *authority* for current intellectual enterprises.

Now, there is something astonishing about this Baconian generation; so much so that one may wonder whether this reading of its disposition is not a trifle exaggerated. So prodigious a self-confidence, so immediate a self-consciousness, that it could afford to boast the complete absence of a lineage

– surely this is a misinterpretation? I do not mean that a generation without intellectual debts is so unlikely an appearance as to be almost incredible – of course it is; indeed, it is impossible. And the Baconians, in this respect, were not what they sometimes claimed to be. What is remarkable, because it is not impossible, is the appearance of a generation so certain of its intellectual identity that it could afford to deny its ancestry. And if we were considering a concrete human society, or even men who understood themselves in terms of their professional skills, we should be inclined to count such a disposition to be so remarkable as to be highly unlikely.

But there are two considerations which help to make it intelligible: one analytical and the other historical. First, an intellectual lineage is a peculiar affair. And whether from vanity, or from genuine but misplaced conviction, it has often been ignored, suppressed, or found to be not interesting enough to mention. There have always been *ésprits forts*, like Epicurus and Hobbes, who have thought it enough to identify themselves in terms of their own alleged absolute originality and have been happy to deny themselves an ancestry. And secondly, the Baconians were not alone in their generation to advertise their release from the past. Indeed, they had a close affiliation with Protestant sects whose members, basing themselves upon immediate inspiration, an 'inner light', divested themselves of any need or impulse to connect themselves with a religious past, either mediaeval or Scriptural. Without formularies, liturgy or legend, they understood themselves in terms of an immediate connection with God as the Baconians understood themselves in terms of their immediate connection with truth.

But, be that how it may, what is noticeable about the Baconians is, first, that they were not merely indifferent to what had gone before, they expressly *rejected* it (at least, lock and stock), and this rejection was one of the means by which they identified their own intellectual enterprises and achievements; and secondly, that they were not without their own characteristic version of the intellectual legend of modern Europe.

This legend was composed of two simple beliefs. First, the intellectual past of the human race was believed to have been a period of almost unrelieved darkness, ignorance, error, credulity and superstition; a disgrace to mankind; an out-spoken testimonial to human indolence, incuriosity and incapacity. What the 'humanists' tended to believe (but never quite believed) about the interval which separated them from classical antiquity, the Baconians believed about the whole intellectual past. Theirs was a legend without heroes, but also without villains – a legend of simpletons among whom Aristotle was *simplicissimus*. And, in a reversal of convention which displayed a breath-taking touch of genius, it was the 'modern' age, the current world, which supplied mankind with its intellectual heroes – cast for the conventional part of initiators *de novo*. It was, then, this backward glance into gloom which supplied the Baconians with an identification of their own achievements. This intellectual gloom was, regrettably, a 'living' past, and, regrettably, it was their own. But, although the Baconians were the confident protagonists of 'modernity' in the seventeenth century controversy, they never quite got over the disgrace, as they understood it, of having been born in an intellectual hovel.

The second belief which belonged to this legend was that the 'modern' world had not yet succeeded in divesting itself of the intellectual indolence characteristic of the past. The belief that its promethean heroes had not received the response which was their due; that intellectual enquiry was still being conducted with a kind of chivalric formality; and that what should have been a 'crash programme' of research was degenerating into an all too agrarian way of life.[1]

Echoes of this legend are still with us. It was not vulnerable to the same enveloping movement as that to which the 'humanist' legend succumbed. But a modification of it, which emerged in the eighteenth century, came to be preferred; and, before suffering the damage which a genuinely historical enquiry about the intellectual past later inflicted upon it, it was attacked and demolished by a legend-maker of genius, namely, Joseph de Maistre – though nobody took much notice of this achievement.

(3) The third version of the intellectual legend of modern Europe was chiefly the work of the French *Enlightenment*. It was a modification of the Baconian legend of the past appropriate to a modification of the Baconian intellectual present.

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[1] In a few years.

The men of the *Enlightenment* recognized themselves in terms of their beliefs, their ideas, their intellectual enterprises and achievements. Consequently, the past which captured their attention was not composed of the deeds of men, of the rise and fall of States and Empires and Ecclesiastical institutions, but of sentiments and ideas, of mental dispositions and customs, of intellectual adventures and intellectual achievements. And the men of the *Enlightenment* were several degrees more self-conscious about this than their immediate predecessors had been. Like Bacon (who, indeed, they took as their patron saint) they were persuaded of the overwhelming importance of what they were thinking; they understood themselves to be the centre of an intellectual revolution. And, like the Baconians, their impulse to make a connection between themselves and the intellectual past of mankind was chiefly in order to celebrate more confidently the novelty and superiority of their own achievements, and to win an intellectual identity for themselves by placing their own gigantic activities in an appropriate context.

In these circumstances, it was, of course, impossible that any *authority* should be attributed to an intellectual past, after the manner of the 'humanist.' But this did not itself entail slavish adherence to Baconian orthodoxy. The early Baconians, because they lived in a world in which 'humanist' beliefs were still very much alive, had felt compelled to identify themselves in terms of a *rejection* of the past. But the men of the *Enlightenment* were in a different situation. As they understood it, the 'authority' which had been attributed to the past had been broken, nobody believed in it, 'modernism' had triumphed; and having nothing to *fear* from the intellectual past they could afford some attitude towards it other than one of mere horror.

Of course, this past must appear to be dimly lit; but there was no necessity to make it pitch dark. Since it was a past from which mankind had already been emancipated, there were moods in which the man of the *Enlightenment* would delight in celebrating his escape by displaying what he had escaped from in less than complementary terms; moods in which he would denote his sense of liberation by pointing to the prison he had broken out of and by bringing to the attention of his contemporaries the unfortunate or detestable character of their former gaolers, Aristotle among them. But there was room for another mood, in which the intellectual past was not written-off as merely non-contributory to 'enlightenment,' but was recognized to be comprised of the intellectual struggles of men, certainly less well-equipped than himself, but at least, on occasion, trying to hold back the tide of error and superstition. And there was even room for the belief that the whole intellectual past could be recognized to compose a single, often slow and uncertain, but progressive movement towards the glories of 'Enlightenment.' Indeed, the intellectual past might even be understood, in the words of Lessing, as *die Erziehung der Menscheit* – 'the education of mankind' – the man of the *Enlightenment* recognizing himself as a graduate.

These were the materials out of which was constructed a new version of the intellectual legend of modern Europe. It was marginally different in feeling from the Baconian version, it was a good deal more elaborate in detail, and since it emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century, the later parts of the legend contained promethean heroes who, so far as Bacon was concerned, were still in the womb of the future.

Like every other legend or saga, it was a 'sketch' of the intellectual past in which the broad changes which had overtaken the intellectual landscape, and the great turning points of change, were recorded. It represented itself as the story of the 'human mind'; an account of the 'march of mind' in which error had given way to less despicable error, in which superstition had been progressively dissolved by the acid of reason, and in which 'the mind' of man was gradually emancipated from its enslavement to what Condillac called 'corrupt methods of enquiry.' The whole intellectual past was seen as a unilinear progress, marked by stages of definable achievement, leading up to current 'Enlightenment' and pointing to a still brighter future. The legend contained reminiscences of older, largely Gnostic, schemes of temporal change, translated from a political into an intellectual idiom; and in many of the accounts of it there was a 'behaviouristic' *euphoria*, the triumph of 'enlightenment' being seen as a method of enquiry which identified mental activities with physical changes.

This legend, with insignificant differences, was set out in numerous pieces of writing during the second half of the eighteenth century. The most famous of these are: Turgot: *Discours à la Sorbonne* (1750); Voltaire: *Essai sur les Moeurs* (1765)[2]; Chastellux: *De la Félicité Publique* (1772); Lessing: *Die Erziehung der Menscheit* (1780); Kant: *Ideen zu einen allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerliche Absicht* (1784); and, best known of all, at the end of the century, Condorcet: *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*.

This legend spread rapidly, far and wide, and (with, of course, some subsequent decoration and elaboration of detail) it fixed itself in European thought so securely that it has never been dislodged.[3] We, like our predecessors, need a legend, and this is the legend in terms of which we are still apt to identify ourselves intellectually. The current six volume UNESCO so-called *History of Western European Thought: cultural* and *scientific development*, for example, is hardly more than a restatement of it, and C.P. Snow's *Two Cultures* is a composition based upon some of its cruder themes. [iii]

(4) I want now to notice one other legend making adventure, not because it reached the dimensions of a legend of the intellectual past of modern Europe, nor because it ever looked like dislodging the legend of the *philosophes,* but because it is legendary in character and because it sprang from a profound dissatisfaction with the account of the 'modern' period in the legend of the *philosophes*. It appeared, in the early nineteenth century, in the writings of Joseph de Maistre, particularly in his *Examen de la Philosophie de Bacon*.

De Maistre believed that the Fall of Man had deprived human beings of a direct, intuitive understanding of themselves and the world, and had imposed upon the human race the burden of having to acquire its knowledge in a long, painful, and still incomplete, process of discovery. He was immensely impressed with the achievements of mankind in this respect; indeed, he was fascinated by the progress of human knowledge. He had a particular veneration for the achievements of such writers as Plato, Aristotle, the Fathers of the Christian Church and (more nearly in his own time) Leibniz; but he was profoundly appreciative of anything which he could recognize as a contribution to it. And his interest and excitement at the advances made in modern natural science was not at all abated by his belief that in all this human beings were guided by divine Providence. In short, he acknowledged a legend of intellectual progress which had room for much that even the 'humanist' was apt to regard as dross.

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[2] The idea of a universal history of mankind. Sketch for an historical picture of the progress of the human mind.

[3] Oakeshott's marginal note: 'Duverger'.

Now, in the legend of the *Enlightenment*, a new and substantive age of intellectual advance had dawned with the appearance of Francis Bacon, who was understood to have endowed mankind with a new and mistake-proof method of enquiry which, in the words of Condillac, constituted nothing less than the 'remaking of the human understanding.' And the particular and revolutionary significance of this method of enquiry was alleged to lie in its universal applicability. It could provide mankind with true knowledge both of the natural world and of human beings themselves: indeed, the virtue of the method was that it recognized no such distinction. It was this part of the legend of the *Enlightenment* which De Maistre rejected as moonshine.

In general, he disliked the patronizing tone of Bacon and the *philosophes* towards the earlier intellectual efforts of mankind. The pretense of having been born in an intellectual hovel he dismissed as a piece of childish vanity.[4] The intellectual past, as he understood it, was the usual mixture of human error and human insight; and the notion that Bacon had pulled mankind out of the pit of unmitigated ignorance was credulous nonsense, worthy of men who were prepared to discern miracles everywhere but in religious experience. Moreover, the contention, which Bacon had written into the legend, that his own age was notably disfigured by human indolence and incuriosity was a ludicrous notion. The great intellectual enterprises, soon to be recognized as 'modern science', were afoot long before the time of Bacon, and Bacon himself was lamentably ignorant of the more important of them.

But his criticism of the philosophes' legend of the post-Baconian period was even more radical; indeed, it led to his re-writing this whole passage of the intellectual legend of modern Europe.

As he understood it, this period of intellectual activity was composed of two main strands of thought, the one genuine and the other counterfeit, the one a great advancement of knowledge and the other an advancement of error which carried with it serious practical consequences, among which were the enormities of the French Revolution.

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[4] The self-advertisement of a self-conscious scholastophy.

There were, first, the unquestionable achievements of the genuine 'scientists' of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These achievements had transformed our understanding of the physical world. And, if this particular intellectual enterprise was on a comparatively narrow front and of limited human significance, none the less it was both remarkable and valuable.

But, secondly, there was the strand of thought which emanated from Bacon himself and with which the *philosophes* had identified themselves. This was at once counterfeit and mistaken by its counterfeiters for the only genuine intellectual enterprise of the time. Indeed, they had written their error into a false intellectual legend of modern Europe.

This false legend had two main features. First, it displayed an almost total ignorance of modern science itself; the *philosophes* did not begin to understand the 'discoveries' of modern science. And secondly, springing from this absence of understanding, the counterfeiters, led by Bacon himself, had embarked upon the absurd enterprise of treating man's knowledge of himself as if it were, not merely a branch of physics, but a branch of what they misconceived physics to be. They had reduced conduct to behaviour and moral knowledge to a knowledge of human impulses. In short, what the *philosophes* attributed to the Baconian method as a virtue was in fact its most significant vice.

De Maistre had much else to say about the Baconians and their successors. He identified the errors of the *Enlightenment* as heresies, and he connected them with Protestantism and particularly with Protestant 'illuminism.' But the important thing for us is that he threw all these criticisms into the form of a new intellectual legend of modern Europe. It was a legend in which what the *philosophes* believed to be true appeared as superstition, and in which some of what they believed to be superstition appeared as true. And it was a legend in terms of which De Maistre could understand himself and his contemporaries.

6. The various circumstances in which this enterprise of constructing a general intellectual legend of modern Europe came to occupy so much of the attention of modern times, and the character of the articles it supplied, are not, I think, difficult to discern. Our business, now, is to consider the relation of all this to the emergence of a genuinely *historical* concern with the intellectual past, which may be observed to be emerging during the nineteenth century and which, in some respects, may be said not yet to have got very far.

Four things are, I think, clear:

(1) This legend-making activity was not itself historical thinking, although the word 'history' was often used in connection with it. It was an activity concerned with the intellectual past of modern Europe parallel to the legend-making activities concerned with deeds and sufferings in which nearly all societies seek an identity for themselves. All that was new about it was its concern with beliefs and ideas and enterprises of enquiry rather than with actions.

(2) It would be absurd to suppose that this legend-making activity did nothing to promote a genuinely historical concern with the intellectual past. It certainly generated an enhanced awareness of an intellectual past, and in doing so it must be recognized to have made more possible the emergence of a history of thought.

(3) This legend-making activity placed serious obstacles in the way of an historical understanding of the historical past. The organizing ideas of legend are different from those of history, and to pass from the one to the other involves a difficult process of translation. Legend is something that history has to surmount, not necessarily in detail but in general design. But, what is more important, the very virtues of legend, the features of a legend which make it a good and useful legend for the purposes for which it is designed, are historical vices.

(4) The enterprise of understanding the intellectual past *historically* emerged gradually. It appeared first in respect of specialized branches of intellectual enquiry, like law and philosophy; and it was not until it had been pioneered there that it began to emerge in respect of a more general intellectual past.

From one point of view, then, the 'history of thought', properly so-called, may be understood to have emerged *out* *of* legend-making activities in respect of the intellectual past of modern Europe, in somewhat the same way as 'the constitutional history of mediaeval England' may be said to have emerged, in the late nineteenth century, *out of* the legend-making activities of English politicians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – Stubbs and Maitland being stages in the process. And the 'history of thought' may conveniently be identified, in the first place, in terms of the features of the legend from which it had to extricate itself before it could emerge on a path of its own.

At the end of the eighteenth century the intellectual past of modern Europe was little but a legend. It was a legend with a single hero – 'the Human Mind', or 'Human Reason', a unique changeless identity, like that denoted in the parallel expression 'Human Nature.' But it was not an Odysseyan story of the wayward adventures and fortunes of this hero; it was the story of the 'March of Mind.' Sometimes, indeed often, this 'march' was observed to have been obstructed; but it appeared as a unilinear process, endowed with a unity of feeling, in which specific events and occasions were turned into symbolic moments. And the intellectual condition of any society at any time was to be identified in terms of the stage it had reached on this single line of intellectual advance.[5]

The change characteristic of this process was not represented as teleological; it was not exactly a potentiality hidden in the human mind being realized. It was, rather, a process in which changes were recognized as external happenings to an unchanging identity; and change was made intelligible in terms of the *Plenoma*, or 'fulfilment', it promised.

The individuals who appeared in this legend were also symbolic, fragments of the single hero and servants of the heroic destiny. There was, indeed, only one person, namely Mankind; and he was engaged in a single enquiry, by means of a single, mistake-proof method, into the truth about himself and the world. These symbolic individuals who composed 'Mankind' were *not* recognized as men doing their thinking in particular circumstances and engaged in seeking answers to circumstantially conditional questions. Rather, they were regarded as identical incubators of 'ideas'; and each 'idea', when it was hatched and fledged, flew about the world as an independent quasi-physical existence. 'Ideas' were not thoughts in the mind of a thinker, each was a solid, fixed, independent 'thought-unit', each was known in terms of its truth or falsity, and each was eligible to be built into various intellectual constructions.

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[5] Cp. James Mill on Indian civilization.

In this legend, the 'human mind' moved from one dramatic peak of achievement to the next; the mist-filled valleys between had no place in the story. Moreover, each peak appeared as a miraculous achievement. What the legend exposed for inspection was a landscape; there was no hint of a geological structure joining and accounting for its features.

Now, every one of the components of this legend constituted an obstacle to the emergence of an historical understanding of the intellectual past: the notions of a unilinear process, of the 'human mind' as an unchanging identity, of a single comprehensive enquiry upon which all were engaged, of symbolic individuals, of 'ideas' known in terms of their timeless truth or falsity, and the alplike landscape of this intellectual past. And the story of the emergence of a 'history of thought' is the story of the replacement of the organizing ideas of this legend by others appropriate to *history*.

It was a slow process. Understandably enough, it began uncertainly and unself-consciously in quasi-historical enterprises, like that of filling in the gaps of the legend. And it appeared earlier in respect of some specialized branches of intellectual enquiry – like law and philosophy – than in respect of the generalized intellectual past.

Überweg's catalogue of eighteenth century 'histories' of philosophy reveals a gradual change from legend to history. Early in the century the assumption of 'historians' of philosophy was that philosophical enquiry is a single enquiry and that philosophers were distinguished from one another, not in respect of their problems, but merely in respect of the answers they give to perennial problems. They were accounts – like that of Aristotle in the *Physics* – of the errors committed by earlier writers in dealing with what were assumed to be the same problems as those which engaged the attention of contemporary philosophers. But, when we reach Hegel's *History of Philosophy*, the change is all the more evident and remarkable because it is not complete. There is still the notion of the 'march of mind', but it has been modified by the perception that philosophy is 'men thinking'; it is a history in which the questions being asked, as well as the answers, change; and in which every philosophical problem is related to specific intellectual circumstances. The intellectual past is no longer composed of 'errors' and 'mistakes'; it is a past in which one intellectual adventure provokes another and in which adventures turn out to be either more or less fruitful. The organizing idea of Hegel's *History* is an idea of 'development'; but it is neither teleological, nor is it a development superimposed upon the material. It is a 'development' in which the starting point of one thinker is the point to which an earlier thinker had brought a particular enquiry, and a 'development' in which one enquiry leads on to another: *quasi cursores*, philosophers hand on the lamp of philosophical enquiry. It is, perhaps, not quite 'history'; but it is certainly not the legend of the *Enlightenment* of the Baconians or of the 'humanists'.

And what Hegel began to do for the history of philosophy, others of his generation were beginning to do for the history of law. The timeless, 'rational' law-maker of legal legend, whose material had been a notional universal 'human nature', has disappeared from the pages of Savigny. No doubt he, and the other members of the so-called 'historical school', did not get all the way: they understood law to be the product of a substantial *Völksgeist*, rather than as the product of the continuous modification of legal ideas to solve the circumstantial legal problems which loom up before a judge or a legislator. If they did not get as far as understanding that the history of law is the history of courts of law in action, at least, they began to extricate themselves from the conditions of legend.

When we turn to the more general intellectual past which had been the main concern of the legend, the emergence of 'history' was an even slower and more difficult birth. An enterprise of historical understanding concerned with moral sentiments, religious beliefs, political emotions and opinions, languages, customs, styles of living, literary and artistic tastes, etc. – in short, with all that goes to compose the mentality of a civilization – such an enterprise at once found itself within the magnetic field of the legend. And yet it could scarcely begin until the appropriate substitutions had been made.

The intellectual past had to be released from its servitude to the current intellectual condition of Europe. Men thinking in specific, local intellectual circumstances had to be substituted for 'the human mind' as a changeless, universal identity; and attention had to be diverted from the grand sweep of intellectual experience and concentrated upon specific passages or specific modes of thought. 'Ideas' had to be released from their solid, timeless characters, and become recognized as thoughts; they had to lose their character as quasi-physical objects, inherited, passed on, possessed or rejected, and come to be regarded as thoughts capable only of provoking thought. And thoughts themselves had to be recognized, not in respect of a timeless truth or falsity, but as events of various dimensions mediated to other events of the same kind and intelligible only in the intellectual context in which they appeared. Indeed, the intellectual adventures of mankind had to be understood in terms of Lessing's maxim – as each man saying what appears to him to be true and leaving truth itself safely in the hands of God. Words had to be divested of universal meanings and read always in their contexts. The alplike landscape of the legend, whose peaks were peaks only in relation to a 'natural' intellectual present, had to give place to something less dramatic; and the landscape itself had to be recognized, not only in terms of its superficial features, but in terms of its geological structure. And, more important than anything else for the emergence of a 'history of thought': the recognition that the materials of the historian of thought are not themselves thoughts but pieces of writing, sermons, prayers, speeches, proceedings in courts of law, rituals, works of art, compositions, buildings, institutions, accounts of actions, etc., whose meanings are to be elicited from the contexts in which they appear.

Nevertheless, this difficult intellectual revolution did take place. Hesitatingly and uncertainly the 'history of thought' did emerge from the eighteenth century legend. Some early pioneers in this enterprise have been discerned: it is conventional, in this respect, to recognize Vico, the Neapolitan polymath, part humanist, part son of the *Enlightenment*, who, nevertheless, stumbled, 'like a somnambulist' (as it has been said) upon intellectual 'history' in his care for the local and the circumstantial, and in his recognition of the difference between 'behaviour' and 'human conduct.' And there were

Scots, and later English, writers who also began to emancipate themselves and set up as historians of thought. But there is not much doubt that the 'history of thought' was, for the most part, the creation of German writers in the nineteenth century, the most notable of whom was Wilhelm Dilthey. These writers gave a name to this new intellectual adventure, calling it *Geisteswissenschaft*; they heard more clearly than anyone else the call to allow the emerging techniques of *Historismus* free-play in respect of the intellectual past; and if the beginning they made in writing the history of thought was mainly concerned with exploring, not intellectual change, but the convolutions of some large-scale intellectual events (like the fifteenth century Italian Renaissance), it was at least a beginning. And that Dilthey, who was born almost as Hegel died, himself died only a little more than fifty years ago, shows us how close we still are to the beginning of this enterprise we call 'the history of thought.'

Perhaps I exaggerate a little when I attribute lucidity to Dilthey; in fact, no man who ever put pen to paper succeeded in being more obscure. But, in the circumstances, it is not surprising that he should have spent a long life stumbling around in the semi-darkness; he was unavoidably an explorer rather than a settler or a planter. And if one were to speak in terms of 'discoveries', what he opened up to us – the idea of an autonomous 'human' world, a world of expressions of human thoughts, to be understood in its own terms and not those of the natural sciences – was, perhaps, the most important of all the 'rediscoveries' of the nineteenth century.

No doubt there were exaggerations. He may be suspected of believing 'history' to be the Queen of the Sciences and of believing that all history is the history of thought. And he certainly believed that the business of the intellectual historian was to find out not what a man had thought, but what he had thought he thought. But, putting these eccentricities on one side, *three* important principles emerge from his writings on the principles of intellectual history.

1. That intellectual history, *Geisteswissenschaft*, is concerned, not with 'the human mind', but with men thinking;[6] not with the 'march of mind', but with the adventures of minds; not with quasi-physical 'ideas' which float around a society and bump into one another like flotsam in the sea, or

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[6] *Kulturgeschichte.*

which, like seeds, when planted bear their pre-destined flowers, but with thoughts which provoke only other unpredictable thoughts in other minds.

2. That, for the historian, every thought has its own specific and local context, and what a man is thinking can be ascertained only from this intellectual context. There are no 'universal' ideas'; there can be no such thing as a dictionary of 'ideas'; and words without context do not identify thoughts.

Moreover, the history of thought is not the same thing as what is called the 'sociology of knowledge.' Indeed, the 'sociology of knowledge' is an unredeemed relic (inherently self-destructive) of the intellectual legend of the *Enlightenment* in which all thinking appeared as a 'reflex' determined by so-called 'social' circumstance.

3. That the materials of a history of thought are not 'ideas', and they are not 'natural phenomena' – that is, inherently meaningless occurrences. They are human artifacts; 'expressions', Dilthey called them, whose 'meanings' in their own intellectual contexts it is the task of the historian to discern. *Geisteswissenschaft* is concerned with everything which conveys 'meaning', it is concerned with it in respect of its conveying 'meaning', and its concern with it is 'historical'.

Thus, the historian of thought will recognize the record of a case in a court of law, not as a judge may recognize it (as a precedent for dealing with another case), but as material for a history (for example) of forensic argument. He will understand Johnson's *Dictionary*, not as a guide to the use of words, but (for example) as material for a history of dictionary-making. A history of scientific thought will be recognized as having nothing to do with the 'natural world', but as concerned with a human intellectual activity.

In short, what constitutes intellectual history is, first, its specifically 'historical' concern, and secondly, its recognition of its material as 'expressions' of thoughts.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[i] LSE 1/1/23. Autograph. See the introduction for a note on the composition of this paper.

[ii] End of the first MS.

[iii] A loose slip inserted in the Oakeshott's in his hand reads: 'All peoples follow by and large the same historical pattern. In this sense, the sociologist can describe the development from feudalism to capitalism,

the different successive stages of capitalism, and so on. In the same way as the biologist can describe the different stages of a man's life, the child, the adolescent, the young adult and the mature man. Duverger p 79.'

Twenty-six

The Character of a University Education

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The world is unusually full of doubts and confusion, and among them is a very considerable confusion about the nature of a university and the character of a university education. Perhaps, this confusion is greatest in those parts of the world where, because universities are an old-established feature of the landscape, they have, until recently, been accepted without very much reflection. Moreover, universities have always been manifold and somewhat ambiguous institutions which naturally resist attempts to define their character. But the creation of many new universities, the appearance of students in large numbers who come with mixed and uncertain expectations, as well as other changes, have shaken us out of the mood of acceptance into a mood of reflection. All over the world universities have now got used to hearing themselves talked about in general terms.

I do not think this is a supremely desirable situation to be in. I would, myself, much prefer to be a member of a confident going concern, not eaten up with doubts about what it is doing or with guilt for not having done it better in the past, and thus able to bend myself to a task which has not degenerated into being itself problematic. But one must take one's time as one finds it, and do one's best to participate in its own peculiar urgencies.

Nevertheless, I feel I ought to ask your forgiveness for reverting to a now rather hackneyed theme. I do so, however, not to sow further doubts, but to try to resolve some which already assail us. In short, I speak as a believer, not (in this matter) as a critical sceptic.

I will make my beginning with a university as a place of learning and teaching.

Learning is the comprehensive activity in which we come to know ourselves and the world around us. It is a paradoxical activity: it is doing and submitting at the same time. And its achievements range from merely being aware to what may be called understanding and being able to explain.

In each of us it begins at birth; and it takes place, not in some ideal abstract world, but in the local world we inhabit. For the individual it terminates only in death; for a civilization it can end only with the collapse of a characteristic manner of life which may deprive us, for the time being, of anything very much to be learned. Sometimes the process of learning is suspended while we use or enjoy what we have learned. But the suspension is, perhaps, never either decisive or complete: there is probably a component of 'learning', and not merely 'having learned', in every notable performance.

By learning I mean an activity possible only to an intelligence capable of choice and self-direction in relation to its own impulses and to the world around it. These, of course, are pre-eminently human characteristics; and, as I understand it, only human beings are capable of learning.

A learner is not the passive recipient of impressions, or one whose accomplishments spring from mere reactions to circumstances; nor is he one who attempts nothing he does not know how to achieve. He is a creature of wants rather than needs, of recollection as well as memory; and he wants to know what to think and what to believe as well as merely what to do. Learning is conduct, not behaviour. In short, these analogies of clay and wax, of receptacles to be filled and empty rooms to be furnished have nothing to do with learners and learning. And the only way decisively to abolish man is to understand him to be incapable of learning by understanding him as a creature capable only of conditional reflexes for whose behaviour the now modish word 'syndrome' is appropriate.

What distinguishes human beings is not their unusually long period of helplessness and dependence, nor is it (as Aristotle thought) their ability to speak to one another and to engage in rational discourse: these are merely symptoms of human character. What distinguishes them is that each is born an heir to an inheritance to which he can succeed only in a process of learning.

If this inheritance were a landed estate, the heir would expect to succeed automatically on the death of his father or on coming of age. It would be conveyed to him by lawyers, and the most that would be expected of him would be legal acknowledgment.

But the inheritance I speak of is not like this. What every man is born an heir to is an inheritance of human achievements; an inheritance of feelings, emotions, images, visions, thoughts, beliefs, ideas, understandings, intellectual and practical enterprises, languages, relationships, organizations, religions, canons and maxims of conduct, procedures, rituals, skills, works of art, books, musical compositions, tools, artefacts and utensils.

The components of this inheritance are beliefs, not physical objects; facts not 'things'; 'expressions' which have meanings or uses which require to be understood because they are the 'expressions' of human minds. The starry heavens above and the moral law within, no less than Dante's 'Divina Commedia' and the city of London, are human achievements.

Now, this world of human achievement can be entered, possessed and enjoyed only in a process of learning. A 'picture' may be purchased, but one cannot merely purchase an understanding of it. And I have called this world 'our common human inheritance' because to enter it is the only way of becoming a human being, and to inhabit it is to be a human being. It is into this world that the child, even in its earliest adventures, initiates itself. Not only may it be entered only by learning, but there is, in fact, nothing else to learn. If, from one point of view, the analogies of wax and clay are inappropriate to learning, from another point of view the analogies of sagacious apes and accomplished horses are no less appropriate. These admirable creatures have no such inheritance; they may only be trained to react to a stimulus and to perform tricks.

But this inheritance is an historic achievement; it is 'positive' and not 'necessary'; it is contingent upon circumstances, it is miscellaneous and incoherent; it is what human beings have achieved, not by the impulsion of a final cause, but by exploiting the opportunities of fortune and by means of their own efforts. It comprises the standards of conduct to which from time to time they have given their preferences, the pro- and con- feelings to which they have given their approval or disapproval, the intellectual enterprises they have happened upon and pursued, the duties they have imposed upon themselves, the activities they have delighted in, the hopes they have entertained and the disappointments they have suffered. The notions of 'finished' and 'unfinished' are equally inapplicable to it. It does not deliver to us a clear and unambiguous message; it offers advice and suggestion, recommendations, aids to reflection, rather than directives. It has been put together, not by designers, but by men who knew only dimly what they did. It is not like a packet of seeds which, implanted in the mind of a learner, *must* blossom, well or ill, according to their own inevitable character; it is a packet of thoughts, without any fixed potentiality, ready to become whatever the learner can make of them.

And this, perhaps, points the way out of what has become the most famous dilemma of all who think about learning and education. Is learning to be understood as acquiring knowledge, or is it to be regarded as a process in which the learner makes the most of himself?

Learning to the student of to-day, highly conscious that he is something on his own account and not particularly humble in his attachment to 'self-expression', seems often a kind of imprisonment; what he seeks is emancipation from what he thinks of as the dead hand of the past.

But, in fact, this discrepancy between entering into and possessing a human inheritance and making the most of himself is an illusion. 'Self-realization' for human beings is not, of course, the realization of an exactly determined end which requires only favourable circumstances in order that it shall be achieved. But, nor is this self an infinite, unknown potentiality which an inheritance of human achievement is as likely to thwart as to promote. Selves are not rational abstractions, they are historic, circumstantial personalities; indeed, they are themselves among the components of this world of human achievements. And there is no other way for a human being to make the most of himself than by learning to recognize himself in the mirror of this inheritance of human achievement.

To learn is not to be put in touch with what is dead, nor is it to be obliged to rehearse the social history of mankind. Death is an inevitable feature of the natural, not the human world; and it is only in nature that generation involves a boring process of recapitulating all the earlier stages of life. To inherit this world of human achievement is often to possess oneself of what does not lie on the surface of the present world, of much that has come to be neglected, and of something, even, that for the time being is forgotten. And to know only what is in current use is to become acquainted with only an attenuated version of this inheritance. To see oneself reflected in the mirror of the current modish world is to see a sadly distorted image of a human being; for there is nothing to encourage us to believe that what has captured a current fancy is the most valuable part of our inheritance, or that what is better survives more readily than what is worse. And nothing of this human inheritance survives which is not cared for by human beings.

This, then, is learning and the general character of what there is to be learned. I will come back to it later to consider what part a university has to play in it. Meanwhile, let us for a moment consider the activity of teaching, for that too is something that belongs to a university.

Teaching is a practical activity in which a person already learned imparts his learning to his pupils. No doubt one may properly be said to learn from books, from gazing at the sky or listening to the waves (so long as one's disposition is that mixture of activity and submission we call curiosity), but to say that the book, the sky or the sea has 'taught' us anything, or that we have taught ourselves, is to speak the language of unfortunate metaphor. The counterpart of the teacher is not the learner in general, but the pupil. This does not mean that I subscribe to the prejudice which attributes all learning to teaching – especially in a university, where to be a pupil and to be taught is not at all the only path to learning. It means only that the office of teacher is one that bears consideration on its own account.

The activity of a teacher is, then, specified in the first place by the character of his partner. The ruler is partnered by the citizen, the physician by his patient, the master by his servant, the commander by his subordinates, the lawyer by his client, the prophet by his disciple, the clown by his audience, the hypnotist by his subject, and both the trainer and the tamer by creatures whose aptitudes are for being trained and tamed. Each of these is engaged in practical activity, but it is not teaching; each has a partner, but it is not a pupil. Like the ruler, or the hypnotist, the teacher communicates something to his partner; his peculiarity is that what he communicates is appropriate to a partner who is a pupil – it is something that can be received only by learning.

It is difficult to think of any circumstances where learning may be said to be impossible. Of course, in some conditions it will take place more rapidly and more successfully than in others; but in principle, it does not depend upon any specifiable degree of attention, and it is not uncommon to find oneself to have learned without knowing how or when it happened. Thus, the random utterances of anyone, however foolish or ignorant, may serve to enlighten a learner, who receives from them as much or as little as he happens to be ready to receive, and receives often what the speaker himself did not know he was conveying.

But such casual utterances are not teaching; and he who scatters them is not, properly speaking, a teacher. Teaching is the deliberate and intentional initiation of a pupil into the world of human achievement, or into some part of it. The teacher is one whose utterances (or silences) are designed to promote this initiation in respect of a pupil – that is, in respect of a learner whom he recognizes to be ready to receive what he has resolved to communicate. In short, a pupil is a learner known to a teacher, a learner for whom he has taken specific responsibility; and teaching, properly speaking, is impossible in his absence.

The part of the teacher, then, is to hold up the mirror of human achievement before a pupil; and to hold it in such a manner that it reflects not merely what has caught the fancy of a current generation, but so that it reflects something which approximates more closely to the whole of that inheritance. His business (indeed, this may be said to be his peculiar quality as an agent of civilization) is to release his pupils from servitude to the current dominant feelings, emotions, images, ideas, beliefs, and even skills, and to bring to their notice what the current world may have neglected or forgotten.

Nevertheless, engaged in initiating his pupils into so contingent an inheritance, the teacher may be excused for thinking that he needs some assurance of its worth. For, like others, he may have a superstitious prejudice against the human race and be satisfied only when he can feel himself anchored to something for which fallible human beings are not responsible. But he must be urged to have the courage of his human circumstances. This man-made inheritance, of which he is the living custodian, contains everything to which value is attributable; it is the ground and context of every judgment of better or worse. If there were a mirror of perfection which he could hold up to his pupils, he might be expected to prefer it to this home-made article. But there is no such mirror. He may be excused if he finds the present dominant image of civilized life too disagreeable to impart with any enthusiasm to his pupils. But if he has no confidence in any of the standards of worth written into this inheritance of human achievement, he had better not be a teacher. His hold upon the mirror would be too unsteady; he would have nothing to teach.

There is an ancient oriental image which recognizes this account of our circumstances and this relation between learner and teacher. In it, the child is understood to owe its physical life to its father, a debt to be acknowledged with appropriate respect. But initiation into this world of human achievements is owed to the Sage, the teacher; and this debt is to be acknowledged with profound reverence – for to whom can a man be more deeply indebted than to those to whom he owes, not his mere existence, but his participation in a genuinely *human* life?

2

This, then, is the world into which we are born – a world made by human beings; the object of all learning and the subject of all teaching. What place does a university occupy within it?

Clearly, a university, as a place where learning goes on (a place, indeed, devoted to learning), may be specified by the sort of people who enter its doors – their age, their earlier attachments in learning and the sort of learning they are now in search of.

For nobody is a university the first attempt to made to possess himself of his human inheritance, nor will it be his last. The conventional age at which a boy or girl enters a university differs in different parts of the world, but everywhere it is preceded by 'school-days'. Thus, a university may be recognized as a place in which our human inheritance is laid out in a manner appropriate to learners who are not beginners.

This tells us something, but not very much. And it does not suggest a distinction which I think it is important to observe. A university, as a place where a number of young people are gathered together for a few of the most impressionable years of their career on earth, will inevitably be the place where many will find themselves acquiring interests which will be with them for life, making decisions which, for themselves, may be momentous, entering into relationships which may be the most durable they will ever enjoy, all of which may be thought of as 'learning'. There is, then, on the one hand what may happen to a student in these years and in these circumstances, and what he happens upon. And, from this point of view, all that need be said is that those who make and manage universities should recognize that this is what a university will unavoidably be for its students. One of the advantages of being at a university should be that these things, which happen to all human beings about that time of life, shall happen in more, rather than less, favourable circumstances. On the other hand, a university is not merely a scene of happenings; it is an institution designed to give something specific to those who have come to it. And in discussing the nature of a university what I want to consider is the gifts it intentionally offers, and not the chance opportunities it affords. A railway station affords shelter from the rain, a place of *rendez-vous*, and has a hundred other potential uses; but what it specifically offers is a train service. What is a university in terms of its intentional design?

Those who have got beyond the view that a university is a place of 'after school' or 'higher' learning often recommend us to think of it as a place where a particular part, by no means the whole, of our human inheritance is displayed for the learner; namely, that part which may be called specifically *intellectual*: here are to be found the fruits of human reflective intelligence gathered together and cared for. One can, perhaps, see what is meant by this; but it leaves me in doubt about what exactly it is intended to exclude, and the suspicion is that it will exclude some things which I would not want to exclude. Perhaps, it is intended to set on one side all that part of our human inheritance which is composed of emotional attitudes, pro- and con- feelings, visions, longings, aspirations and the moral adventures of mankind. But I do not myself see this as more than a rather arbitrary distinction; and as I have interpreted it, the whole of this human inheritance is to be regarded as the work of the human mind, the product of human intelligence. Moreover, this picture makes a university look too much like a warehouse for my liking. This being so, I prefer to go on another tack in trying to distinguish what learning and teaching in a university is specifically concerned with.

This inheritance of human accomplishments – which we may call a civilization – may, from one point of view, be seen as a collection of skills which together define and make possible a current manner of living. Acquiring one of these skills – that of a lawyer, a doctor, an accountant, a farmer or a commercial traveller – is taking possession of a part of this inheritance of human achievement in a process of learning.

Each of these skills has an intellectual component. In some it is greater than others; and a rough measure of this intellectual component is to be found in the length of time it takes to acquire the skill concerned. Thus, in this view of it, a civilization has the naïve appearance of things known and skills practiced which are entailed in a current manner of living. This manner of living is never completely coherent; there are new skills on their way in, and old skills on their way out. And every skill in use is, we may suppose, being improved.

Now, what is learned in this respect has three important characteristics. First, for most people, what is learned is a single skill. No doubt, there are jacks-of-all-trades; but, in respect of skills, our inheritance of human achievement has become so complicated that our current way of living depends very much on people who have so high a degree of proficiency that no man is likely to be master of more than one skill. Learning, here, is a highly specialized activity. Secondly, learning one of these skills, which keep a current society going, is acquiring a specific body of information, and being able to use it with ease and assurance. This body of information is strictly limited (though it may in some cases be large), and it does not significantly look outside itself. It is naturally concerned with the latest achievements of human thought in relation to a particular skill. And thirdly, learning one of these skills is learning *how* to do something which is needed to keep a current society going: the achievements of this learning are all exhibited in the practice of this skill.

Thus, when a civilization is recognized as a collection of skills, each representing a human achievement, which makes possible and sustains a current manner of living, learning may be recognized as a man fitting himself to fill a specific place in his society and to satisfy a current demand. Nobody learns skills which are never practiced.

Now, to regard our inheritance of human achievements as a collection of skills to be learned, and of inventions, devices, and enterprises in which we have learned to impress ourselves upon the world, exploit its natural resources, and make it the sort of place we want to live in, is one way of looking at it; but it is not the only way. Those who hand these skills on from generation to generation, each adding its own improvements, are certainly agents of civilization; but this is not all there is to be handed on. And, in my view, a university, and learning in a university, represents a complementary way of regarding this inheritance. For this inheritance of human achievement, which we can succeed to only in a process of learning, and in relation to which we become and are human beings, contains something else; namely, the various enterprises of understanding and explaining ourselves and the world we find ourselves in. And these are what I think a university is concerned with.

This, you may think, is a distinction without a difference. 'Surely (you may say), these practical skills entail an understanding both of ourselves and the components of the world we live in. And surely there is a lot which goes on in universities, and has always gone on in universities, which is indistinguishable from teaching and learning the skills which sustain a current manner of living. Perhaps, universities have been more concerned with those skills which have a large intellectual component; nevertheless, these are among the most important of the practical skills which we use in impressing ourselves on the world.' Yes. There is truth in both these observations, but they lie to one side of what I am suggesting.

Learning a practical skill is acquiring appropriate information and knowing how to use it to achieve desired results. What is to be learned appears as reliable conclusions reached, facts established and useable. No doubt much of this information is to be recognized as the product of enterprises designed to enlarge our understanding of ourselves and the world. But properly speaking, it is a by-product. For there is an important difference between learning which is concerned with the degree of understanding necessary to practice a skill, and learning which is expressly focused upon an enterprise of understanding and explaining. In the one case, what is to be learned appears as a result detached from the process in which it was acquired; but in the other case, what is to be learned is how to participate in an enterprise of understanding which may or may not yield detachable results.

A 'science', for example, for the learner of a practical skill, is a collection of information capable of being used; but a 'science' in a university is an intellectual pursuit, an explanatory manner of thinking and speaking, being explored. From time to time, no doubt, it may throw off these useable pieces of information; but to do so is not its business. Doctrines, ideas, facts and theories which are invested elsewhere to yield practical profits (like the Mendelian theory of biological inheritance or the molecular structure of matter), in a university are recognised as temporary achievements, valued solely for their explanatory value, in an enterprise of understanding which is, in principle, both endless and autonomous. A 'science' in a university does not have even the appearance of being a warehouse in which items of information are stored, ready for use.

Thus, when a student, entering a university, chooses for himself a field of study – chemistry, biology, economics, sociology – which in some cases may look all too like the opportunity of acquiring the knowledge necessary to practice a skill, what he is really doing is choosing to be initiated into one of the great explanatory enterprises which belong to his human inheritance.

Moreover, there are many enterprises of understanding pursued in universities, like history or philosophy, which cannot be expected to throw off any such by-products of readily useable conclusions and which, consequently, may scarcely be mistaken for anything but autonomous enterprises of understanding.

In short, our inheritance of human achievements includes, not only the skills we need for transforming the world, but also (and independently) these great, autonomous, enterprises of understanding ourselves and the world. And, whatever the adventitious appearances to the contrary, it is with these that learning at a university is concerned. It is participation in this which is the common character of all the faculties of a university; it is this common character which makes nonsense of the modish notion of 'two cultures'; and it is this common engagement in understanding which gives to the activity of teaching in a university its distinctive character. For teaching, here, is not imparting information; it is holding up the mirror of a civilization in such a manner that what is to be seen in it is men thinking, men engaged in the supremely intellectual activity of understanding the world and themselves.

Moreover, it is the manner in which teaching is carried on in a university which stands in the way of our mistaking these enterprises of understanding merely for other skills, perhaps less immediately useful than the practical skills, but nevertheless sharing the common characteristics of all skills.

In a university, a 'science' is taught by one who is actually engaged in exploring it, history is taught by historians, philosophy by philosophers. But students who come to study a 'science', or history, or philosophy are not regarded as apprentices to a particular explanatory skill. It is possible that some of them will become 'scientists', or historians, but the vast majority will not. And what a teacher in a university is doing, is not educating successors to himself (though some of his pupils may turn out to be this), it is imparting to his pupils some familiarity with one of the enterprises of understanding as autonomous intellectual pursuits. What he is doing is showing them what it is like to think as a 'scientist' or as an historian.

And, here perhaps, there is a certain oddity in the situation. For long enough it has been believed that, even for people who are to spend the rest of their lives in practical occupations of one sort or another, it is a good thing for them to spend three of four years, at this time in their lives, not in learning a professional skill, but in becoming acquainted with some of the great enterprises of human understanding and explanation – becoming acquainted, that is, with what may be recognized as the 'academic' attitude towards the world. It has been believed that one who is not himself going to be a 'scientist', or an historian, or a philosopher is not wasting his time acquiring, not some information (which might always come in useful), but some insight into what it is to be a 'scientist' or an historian. This is the belief which, in a certain sense, constitutes a university as a place of education. And, although I cannot say where it sprang from, I do not think it is either an eccentric belief, or one incapable of being defended.

No literature can consist entirely of masterpieces. The circumstantial context of masterpieces is a vast body of writings of less than this quality, and a public educated by them to recognize and appreciate the masterpiece. And, in somewhat the same manner, the great enterprises of understanding pursued by human beings depend upon the appreciation of men who can recognize them, and even be excited by them, but who do not and cannot actually participate in them. Thus, the university student of 'science', though he may never himself become a scientist in the strict sense, plays a not unimportant part in making possible the explanatory enterprise we call a 'science'. Indeed, I believe he plays a more important and less equivocal part in this than the man who merely uses, in a practical enterprise of exploitation, the information and ideas which are the useable by-products of scientific thinking.

Moreover, the most important gift of a university to the society in which it has a place is not the provision of the useful by-products thrown off by some enterprises of understanding, but the opportunity it offers, to many or few, of not going through life without having had a glimpse, though perhaps no more than a glimpse, of that part of their human inheritance to which these enterprises belong: the opportunity to possess, more completely than falls to the lot of everybody, the whole of this inheritance of human endeavour and achievement.

A society aware of its human inheritance, brought up to value it and take pride in it, and recognizing that none of it can be possessed except in a process of learning, and that some of it is not to be judged by its immediate usefulness – such a society will be disposed to afford as much as it reasonably can from its resources for its university, and for the sort of education that goes on in universities. Clearly, this will not be the first charge on a pioneer society: the homestead, the school-house, the church and the market-place may be expected to come before the university; and the farmer, the soldier, the man of business, the lawyer, the politician, even the poet and the players of musical instruments, will come before the scholar. But, in our notion of a civilized society, something will be lacking until the university makes its appearance. And when it appears it will be recognized to be an association of persons engaged in caring for and attending to this inheritance of enterprises of understanding. It will be concerned, not merely to keep this intellectual inheritance intact, but to be continuously recovering what has been lost, restoring what has been neglected, collecting together what has been dissipated, repairing what has been corrupted, reconsidering, reshaping, and reorganizing these adventures of human understanding.

Its scholars will live at what is called 'the frontiers of knowledge'; and they will recognize themselves as engaged in intellectual pursuits rather than as gatherers or custodians of a store of information. And their pupils will be spectators at performances, and will carry away with them (when the time comes to go out into the world) whatever glimpses, impressions or insights they may have acquired of such men at work.

For, there is something properly and unavoidably 'cloistered' about a university. Its pursuits have only an oblique relationship to the world in which immediate usefulness is the criterion of importance. It is a luxury – not in the sense that what it supplies is superfluous to all but the very sophisticated, but in the sense that this belongs to the world of human wants rather than to the world of human needs.

Not being comparable to a light-industry (having no product, in the strict sense), nor to a store (having no sales-list of items for disposal), a university is apt to confound the accountants. Profit and loss, cost and return on capital are not easily calculable; indeed, there is something inappropriate in making the calculations. It illustrates the truth that there is nothing great in the world that does not involve waste, and that the human propensity to avoid waste (which has itself been erected into a science) is, perhaps, one of our greatest intellectual vanities. But to me, at least, the tendency of modern universities to become immensely costly affairs, both relatively and absolutely, is regrettable. If they were poorer they might be better – as long as their poverty was recognized as an opportunity to go more warily in setting-up new (and often not very well-considered) faculties, or for the exclusion of distracting frills.

But universities or proto-universities having appeared – that is, associations of scholars engaged in exploring the great human enterprises of intellectual understanding – their recognition as valuable educational institutions opens up some difficult questions. Who are to enjoy the benefits of an education of this kind?

Clearly, there will be some who, by native ability and by their willingness to submit to the discipline of academic study and by their willingness to endure the detachments and privations it entails, single themselves out as appropriate. These, let me say again, are not confined to those who have discovered in themselves a vocation for scholarship; they will include also others who, though they will never be scholars, are reluctant to pass through life without having been acquainted with some of the great intellectual pursuits of mankind. And, although there may be ways of discovering who these are, and the relation between their abilities and their ambitions, these devices will not be infallible, even if the criterion remains uncorrupted.

But, as generation succeeds to generation, and the life of the student – largely on account, not of the academic opportunities a university expressly offers, but because of what it affords as a scene of happenings – begins to acquire an irresistible allure, the claim not be excluded from it begins to appear as the claim not to be excluded from one of the major pleasures of civilized life.

And when, added to this, having enjoyed the life of a student, and having, perhaps, acquired a university degree, is recognized as conferring a desirable social status and perhaps opening the door, not merely to the 'learned professions', but to the wonderland of personal fortune, wealth and prosperity, then we have before us a situation recognizably our own.

Let me say something about each of the components of this situation. *What* I recall as the experience of going to university is the sense of entering upon a life from which, so nearly as may be, the sordid ambitions and the collective inanities of the world had been magically excluded; the feeling of being emancipated from the pressures of immediate achievement; the offer of an opportunity to look around, without enemies at one's back, and without having to come to immediate decisions; the release from old commitments entered into in the semi-conscious years of childhood, and the absence of haste to contract new ones; the leisure, the sense of adventure and the companionship of others of the same kind; the opportunity to make mistakes without having to pay heavily for them: and all this, not in a vacuum or in a museum, but surrounded by the inherited learning, literature, and experience of our civilization and by men engaged in exploring this inheritance and adding to it; and not as a sole occupation, but combined with the discipline of study. And *when* I recall it, it seems to me so valuable an experience that I would not know how to deny it to anybody. Yet, it was what it was, in virtue of the fact that it corresponded to the wants and expectations of the great majority of my companions; and if it had had imposed upon it different wants and expectations, it would have dissolved, leaving behind only the little which was able to withstand the invasion.

I could not have written off as merely illegitimate the wants and expectations of such invaders. I could not do this even if they were the desire for well-digested useful information to be handed to them on a plate; the desire for the opportunity, not to learn to think, but to shout mindless and barbaric slogans to one another; the desire to win the easy victories which fall to a feeble *libido dominandi* exercised over the diffidence of half-formed and uncertain personalities; or even merely the desire to live at ease and postpone the time when the simple but inexorable demands of adult life have to be responded to. But I cannot avoid the conclusion that a university handed over to the satisfaction of these wants and expectations, or their like, has ceased to be a university; and that this is the main consideration to be taken into the account when we consider the place of university education in a society.

In respect of the other component of our situation – our recognition of a university career as the passport to social prestige, to power and to emolument – there is this to be said. I think we have gone too far in this direction. In exaggerating the esteem which attaches to this qualification we have depressed the esteem which has hitherto attached to many others, and we are prejudicing the appearance of new ways of acquiring esteem. Those who have been to a university have had the opportunity of acquiring some admirable qualities, and many of them have actually acquired them; but we are wrong to confine our admiration to these. There are many others, for which a university is not the natural seed-bed, and these should not be excluded from our esteem. Moreover, if we accord this exclusive esteem to a university education, we shall end by imposing upon universities a distracting and corrupting engagement – that of providing for the education of everybody who, for whatever reason, we are to admit to our esteem. And that way lies ruin.

Those who have passed their lives in universities are not so vain as to have chosen this engagement for themselves; it is something which, in present circumstances, they are liable to have imposed upon them, not merely by designing governments, but also, and more powerfully, by the less detectable pressures of our single-minded modern societies. In a civilization which has sold itself to the plausible ethics of productivity and in doing so has given itself a narrow path upon which to tread, and in societies which have begun to think of themselves, more and more, in the exclusive terms of 'an economy', it is only to be expected that universities should be pressed into the common pattern, and be made servants of the social purpose. But in these circumstances, they become institutions in need of care and protection; not because what they have to offer is something to be ashamed of, but because it seems to grow daily less relevant to those current wants which have won our exclusive attention. This single-minded endeavour to provide for the needs of a technological society has been seen by some as an opportunity for university education to win the applause of those who have hitherto been doubtful or indifferent. But this is not so; what such an endeavour seeks is only the adventitious by-products of the great enterprises of human understanding and explanation. And universities, the custodians of these enterprises, are, at best, offered a package-deal with regard to the students they take and what they are to be taught, which entails partial surrenders; and, at worst, they find themselves wholly suborned.

'Academic freedom' has become a cant phrase in the mouths of well-meaning but muddled advocates. But, in fact, it can sustain only one meaning: the freedom to be academic, the freedom of a university to pursue its explorations of the enterprises of human understanding and to initiate successive generations of students into this intellectual inheritance. It is false friends, rather than open enemies, we should beware of; those whose friendly gestures and offers of help are all too often incitements to desert. The time may come when, in the face of the vulgarity of a single-minded devotion to the exploitation of the world and of the barbarism of instant affluence, learning will have to hide its head, and universities will survive only by the exercise of the courage of their calling and by becoming retreats devoted to keeping alive, in hostile circumstances, the great disinterested enquiries of mankind. But that time is not yet. Universities still have some genuine and discerning friends, many of whom have themselves never enjoyed the opportunities they offer; and there are students, alive to the enchantment of the pursuit of understanding, and for whom a university education, uncorrupted, and with all its ardours and severities, is an answer to their hopes, desires, and expectations. And to these friends, all who love learning and who do not believe that learning is the only thing in life, are humbly grateful.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[1] LSE 1/1/57. Typescript. Oakeshott wrote at the top of the first sheet in pencil: 'Calgary'.

Twenty-seven

What is Political Theory?

The expression 'political theory' or 'a theory of politics' is familiar to us. Our question this afternoon is: What are we to understand by it? Or rather, How are we to begin to think about what we are to understand by it? because I want to put the emphasis, not upon a conclusion, but upon an enquiry about how such a question may be answered.

Here, two words, 'theory' and 'politics', are made to qualify one another. We know that each may have other qualifications: we speak of 'political manoeuvre', 'political party' and 'a style of politics'; and of 'economic theory', 'games theory' and 'a theory of knowledge'. Consequently we may suppose that the expression 'political theory' or 'theory of politics' is intended to point to something distinct. And what this may be will, I think, appear only by considering each of these ideas, 'theory' and 'politics', in separation. I will begin with 'theory'. The word, of course, is Greek; and in the Greek language it belongs to a short vocabulary of five words which is worth considering:

Thea: something seen, a 'spectacle', an occurrence.
Theorein: to look at, to observe what is going on.
Theoros: an intelligent observer; one who looks at what is going on, asks himself questions about it and tries to understand it.
Theoria: the act or procedure of seeking to understand what is going on: 'theorizing'.
Theorema: what may emerge from 'theorizing'. A conclusion reached by a *theoros*. 'An understanding' of what is going on. A 'theorem'.

Now, the first virtue of this vocabulary is that it distinguishes between the activity of 'theorizing' and any possible out-come of the activity, a 'theorem'. This distinction is obscured in our own usage where 'theory' (e.g., in the expression 'political theory') may mean an activity or a conclusion, indifferently.

Secondly this vocabulary centres upon the activity – 'theorizing' – which is identified as an effort to understand. 'Theorizing' is not validating or 'proving' a conclusion reached, it is a procedure of discovery or enquiry. It is, briefly, the urge to inhabit a more intelligible or a less mysterious world.

Now, this vocabulary makes several important suggestions about this activity of understanding.

(1) Theorizing begins with something already in some degree understood. The *thea*, the occurrence with which it starts, is not merely 'looked at'; it is 'perceived', 'noticed', 'attended to', 'identified', perhaps even named. The *thea* itself is the first account we give to ourselves of what is going on. It is already in some sense 'intelligible' or it could not and would not be 'noticed' and 'distinguished'. It is what we ordinarily call a 'fact'. Thus, what is being suggested is that understanding is not something which we either enjoy or lack completely: we are never wholly without it, and we are always liable to want more than we have. We can never get back to any 'thing' which is not an account that we give to ourselves of an occurrence.

(2) Secondly, it is suggested that this *thea*, this 'fact', is not only understood, but is also waiting to be understood. It is the contingent starting place for an activity of 'theorizing'. And 'theorizing' takes place because the *theoros* is in some respect, or in some degree, dissatisfied with his first understanding of what is going on. A mystery, an unintelligibility remains which he wants to dispel. He does not know in advance what the *thea* will look like when it has become entirely intelligible; all he knows is that it is not entirely intelligible as he at present understands it. He has something to do.

(3) Thirdly, it is suggested that 'theorizing' is an effort to understand in a procedure of *enquiry*. That is to say, the *theoros* does not sit gazing at the occurrence merely wondering what is really going on; his urge to make it more intelligible springs from specific dissatisfactions with his present understanding. There is mystery still to be dispelled, and this

mystery consists of specific questions which his present understanding leaves unanswered.

(4) Fourthly, it is suggested that in any conclusion he may reach, his 'theorem' will be nothing more than an improved understanding of what was, from the beginning, in some degree understood.

Thus, there is no absolute distinction between 'fact' and 'theorem'; both are conclusions, both are understandings of what is going on, but one is a more satisfying understanding than the other. And there is no absolute difference between *theorein* ('observing' what is going on) and 'theorizing' what is going on; both are reflective activities in which an understanding of what is going on is being sought.

'Theorizing', then, is being represented here as a continuous, unconditional activity of trying to understand. It begins with an occurrence which is both understood and waiting to be understood. It is making more sense out of what already has some sense. And its principle is: 'Never ask the end'. It will go on until the occurrence becomes transparent, until the last vestige of mystery has been dispelled, until the *theoros* runs out of questions.

On the way it is to be expected that he will reach various platforms of conditionally satisfactory understanding; that is, situations in which one whole set of questions has received answers. But each of these platforms of conditional intelligibility will be, not only a temporary landing-stage, but also a taking-off ground; because the *theoros* cannot prevent the conditions themselves from becoming the subject of a whole set of new questions.

Let me illustrate:

This Greek vocabulary of 'theorizing' was connected with what may be called an 'inspectorate' of religious, dramatic and legal performances, and the word *thea* stood, among other things, for something to be observed going on in a 'theatre'. Thus, we may conveniently recognize a *theoros*, in the first place, not as a mere play-goer, but as a person specifically engaged in trying to understand what is going on – a dramatic critic, say, observing a performance, say, of Sophocles' 'Antigone'.

His business will be to try to understand the play as a piece of dramatic writing, and to consider the interpretation of it offered in this performance. He will be concerned with the work of the author, the producer and the actors. And the understanding he achieves will be contained within considerations which, as a dramatic critic, he has no impulse to question. For example, he may consider the emotions aroused by the play and the skill with which the author and the actors achieve this; but he won't go on to enquire: 'what is an emotion?' That is to say he will occupy a fairly well-defined platform of understanding in which his attention is focused upon an actual performance.

But beginning from roughly the same *thea* as the dramatic critic, Aristotle in the *Poetics* occupies and explores a different and much more general platform of understanding. He is not concerned with the virtues and vices of a particular performance; he is concerned with 'drama'. He understands 'drama' as a certain sort of 'art', and 'art' as a certain sort of '*techne*', and '*techne*' as a certain sort of knowledge. Whereas the critic might say that the jokes in a comedy were good jokes and made him laugh and express his understanding in laughter – he 'sees the joke', Aristotle would be concerned to construct a *theorēma* of laughter itself. The critic might remark on the ineffectual 'timing' of an entrance or an exit; but Aristotle is concerned with 'time' as a component of drama. And so on. But the important point is that the serious *theoros*, the man who really wants to understand, will always begin to question the conditions of any conditional platform of understanding he may have reached. In other words, 'theorizing' is, itself, an unconditional, continuously critical attempt to achieve complete intelligibility.

Now, having insisted upon the continuous and unconditional character of the engagement to 'theorize', there is something else to be said.

This commitment to go on asking questions, to be critical of the conditions of every conditional understanding, may be arrested, stopped short.

(1) First, it may be *arbitrarily* arrested. The *theoros* may say: 'I have a particular and limited purpose in wanting to understand what is going on, and the understanding I have now achieved satisfies this purpose and I do not propose to proceed with the enquiry any further. I have achieved *an* understanding of what is going on; I can see that it rests upon certain conditions or assumptions, but I do not propose to

subject these conditions to enquiry; I propose to *use* the understanding I have achieved and not to try to improve it'.

There was once a girl being instructed about a slide-rule who said to her instructor: 'I don't want to understand it, I only want to know how to use it'. Now, she was calling for an arbitrary arrest in the commitment to understand, and she had a good, if arbitrary, reason for doing so; she only went wrong in not recognizing 'Knowing how to use it' a specific platform of understanding, inhabitable, inextinguishable, capable of its own conditional perfection, but unable to defend itself against further enquiry.

Now, this kind of arbitrary arrest in the activity of 'theorizing' is common enough, and we could not get on without it. For example, if courts of law were unable to accept the conditionality of the expression 'the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth', and if their proceedings were, always and as a matter of course, suspended while the magistrate (assisted by his clerk) considered the question, 'What is truth', no case would ever be decided.

But the genuine *theoros* has no urge to arrest the enquiry in any such arbitrary manner. He has no limited purpose to satisfy; he is not concerned to reach an understanding which he can *use*; he is simply concerned to understand as completely as may be.

(2) Secondly, there may be forms of what may be called systematic *arrest* in the engagement to understand.

A *systematic* arrest appears when the *theoros*, for the purpose of understanding, settles upon some general condition which he refuses to criticize, and when he understands whatever he is called upon to understand in terms of that condition.

The simplest example of this kind of arrest in 'theorizing' appears in the determination to understand everything and anything in terms of settled scales of measurement, in terms of *quantities*. Things understood simply as quantities compose a conditional platform of understanding, inhabitable and capable of its own conditional perfection. 'Theorizing' here is a determination to explore this systematically conditional platform of understanding.

This, perhaps, is the only absolutely transparent example of a systematic arrest in the activity of 'theorizing'. But there are other, somewhat vaguer, but nevertheless recognizably the same kind of thing: for example, what is called a 'psychological' understanding or explanation. Exactly what conditions are being posited here, is difficult to say; but I think it is clear that when a *theoros* says he is seeking a 'psychological', or a 'chemical' understanding, he is laying down for himself *some* systematic conditions, and that this is the meaning of such expressions as 'psychological', 'chemical' 'physical', 'biological' and perhaps 'sociological' when combined with the words 'theory', or 'understanding' or 'explanation'. And, in all such cases, the occurrence which sets on foot the enquiry is merely the contingent starting place of the enquiry. The *same* enquiry could have started from any one of a limitless number of other *theai;* and the conclusion of this enquiry is not a theorem about the *thea* which happened to be its actual starting place.

(3) Now, there is a third kind of arrest of the unconditional urge to theorize which is neither arbitrary, nor systematic. I haven't got a word for it, but I will try to describe it.

Every engagement to understand has an acknowledged starting-place in some ostensively identified 'fact' of experience. It begins in an enquiry *about* an occurrence, a *thea*. And it proceeds by asking questions. These questions may be contained or limited by arbitrarily chosen conditions, or by a systematically chosen general condition, but they may also be contained or limited by the manner in which the 'fact' of experience to be understood has been identified. What is *accepted* by the *theoros* is the identification of the 'fact' of experience. And the questions he asks are conditioned by this 'fact'. This, for example, is the case when the questions asked are: 'What other occurrences is this occurrence like or unlike?' or, 'What other occurrences may this occurrence be connected or correlated with?' When such questions as these are being asked, what is being sought is a more exact appreciation or understanding of an occurrence in terms of the qualities or features which already constitute it as a 'fact' of experience. And when this is the case, the *thea*, the occurrence is not merely a *contingent* starting place for the enquiry; it is a necessary anchor of the enquiry.

Let me give you an example. Aristotle, at one point in the *Politics*, recognized or identified a *polis* as a collectivity of human beings, and he asks the question: What other collectivities is it like or unlike? Is it like the collectivity of a swarm of bees, or a colony of ants, or a 'tribe', or a 'household'? He finds that there is something wrong with each of these comparisons, but by asking this sort of question he has tied himself to a specific identification of a *polis*, and the only conclusion he can reach is a better appreciation of a *polis as a collectivity*. In short, the conclusion to the enquiry is *exactly* tied to the 'fact', the recognition, the identification of *polis* with which he began. He has, no doubt, learned more about a *polis*, but only about a *polis* identified as a collectivity of human beings.

In this kind of arrested 'theorizing' the condition which specifies the arrest is that the *thea* as originally identified should not be changed, dissolved, reduced to something else, understood in other terms or explained away. The principle here is that, in understanding it, the appearance of the 'fact' of experience must be saved. This, for example, is the principle which prevails in any simple classificatory understanding, such as Linnean 'botany': the terms of the classifications are given in the observed features of the occurrences. 'Vertebrates' compose a 'class' because they share a common observed feature.

Now, there will be more to be said about this in a moment, but that is all I have to say about the activity of 'theorizing'. 'Theorizing' is an urge to understand which may suffer various different sorts of arrest or suspension, but in principle is unconditional and continuous and has no ulterior purpose to serve. But it is enough, perhaps, to suggest some lines to go upon in thinking about the expression 'political theory' or 'theory of politics'.

In this expression, the word 'political' or 'politics' clearly stands for some kind of condition or limitation or focus of attention for the activity of 'theorizing'. And the first question is: what kind of condition or limitation does it stand for?

Is it an arbitrary condition? No. At least it is not like the examples of arbitrary limitation I have given. In qualifying the idea 'theorizing' by the idea 'politics', the *theoros* is not saying: 'I have a limited purpose in wanting to understand, and the word 'politics' stands for an intelligibility sufficient to satisfy that limited purpose'.

Is it a systematic condition? No. The word 'politics' is not like the word 'quantitative', or 'psychological' or 'chemical', or 'physical'. It does not stand for a general condition of understanding which the *theoros* has accepted and does not propose to question.

Surely, the word 'politics', here, stands for an identification of 'that which is to be "theorized"' or understood, an *explicandum*, not for a method or kind of understanding. But, in the vocabulary I have used so far, 'that which is to be "understood"' or 'theorized' is a *thea*, an identified 'fact' of experience. And it would appear that the expression 'political theory' stands for an activity of 'theorizing', an urge to understand, *tied* to an identified 'fact' of experience.

Thus, we may imagine the *theoros* saying something like this: 'I have been able to distinguish an occurrence, or a whole kind of occurrence, going on in the world, a *thea*. And I have announced this achievement by giving a name to what I have distinguished: I call it a "political occurrence". Don't rush me into telling you exactly how I have distinguished and identified this sort of going-on. That will come later. For the moment all I can tell you is that what I mean by a "political" occurrence is *not*, for example, a performance of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', or a class of children being taught arithmetic in a village school. I have got something distinct, and I hope to make it more distinct, and in doing so I am already embarking upon an activity of "theorizing". As a *theoros* I am interested in "understanding" what I have provisionally identified as "politics", and having taken this as my engagement I announce myself as a "political theorist"'.

Now, if this is the case, a 'political theorist' is a *theoros* engaged in exploring a conditional platform of understanding, the specifying conditions of which are those of an activity going on which he has managed to make distinct and has called 'politics'. In fact, he will be like a 'theorist' of 'art' or 'education'. He is going to 'theorize' an already specified activity or occurrence.

He will, of course, always be tempted to question the conditions he has imposed upon himself: 'theorizing' is, itself, an unconditional engagement. But his only hope of achieving a better understanding *of* what he has identified as politics lies in being able to resist the temptation to question the limits he has imposed upon himself.

This, I take it, is what Aristotle meant when he says that a theorist who engages himself to understand some 'fact' of experience must *not* say anything which denies that 'fact' of experience. The 'fact' of experience is, in some sense, the master of the undertaking, or at least the *condition* of the undertaking.

Now, this is a somewhat odd situation. If the 'theorist' is genuinely *tied* to the identification of the 'fact' of experience with which he begins his enquiry, what is there for him to say which he has not already said in identifying the 'fact' of experience? The theorems he composes about 'politics' will, of course, be continuous with his identification of 'politics': observing, distinguishing and so on are only the early stages of a continuous engagement to understand. But what is being said here is, not merely that identifying and theorizing are a single continuous engagement, but that when the 'fact' of experience has been clearly distinguished, there is nothing more to be said.

But if 'political theory' is not an empty expression, there must be more to be said. And the question is: What is it?

I think I can answer this question best in an example. Aristotle's *Ethics* purports to be a theoretical understanding of a 'fact' of experience. This 'fact' of experience is identified in various ways, the simplest, perhaps, by utterances like: 'That action (which I see being performed) is a good action', or 'This is virtuous conduct, this is vicious'.

Now, we hear statements of this sort being made every day. They are intelligible; we know what they mean. They are 'facts' of human experience. But if we know what they mean, what is there for a 'theorist' to do? How can they be understood *better* than they are understood?

It is clear that Aristotle thought there was something more to be said which was not simply saying the same thing in other words. There is something to be said about moral judgments which moral judgments do not themselves enunciate. And he thought of the business of the *theoros* as that of elucidating the *postulates* of moral conduct or moral utterances. The business of a theorist here is to understand a 'fact' of experience in terms of its *postulates,* and, if possible, in terms of a *system* of postulates – a set of related concepts such as: deliberation, choice, purpose, intention, action, outcome, duty, responsibility, justification, excuse, freedom, happiness etc. etc.

Now, what are these postulates, and what is their relation to the 'fact' of experience – moral conduct or moral judgment – which they purport in some manner to 'explain'?

They are general concepts, which signify states of mind or dispositions, which do not, or need not, actually appear in moral utterance, but which are required to 'explain' or to give transparency to moral utterances. Perhaps, they might be called the *unstated assumptions* of moral utterance, which, when they are selected and the relations between them are explored, make larger, or superior, or better sense of moral utterances as a 'fact' of experience. Not more sense of *this* moral utterance distinguished from *that*, but of all moral utterances. A postulate of moral conduct is not an idea which a man who performs a moral action – that is an action recognized to be either right or wrong – must be supposed to have in his consciousness when he acts; it is an idea without which his acting in the way he does act remains opaque, or improperly understood.

Now, I don't think it can be denied that to understand an occurrence or a kind of occurrence in terms of its necessary postulates is understanding it better than it would otherwise be understood. This is certainly the sort of activity appropriate to a 'theorist'. But it will be what it purports to be, that is a superior understanding *of* the 'fact' of experience concerned, only if this 'fact' is *accepted* in the sense that nothing in it is denied by the postulates; and if the postulates are stated as theorems, *related to* the 'fact' of experience.

That is to say, theorizing here is not exactly *tied* to the 'fact' of experience to be theorized, but it is *tethered* to it; and the 'fact' of experience itself supplies conditions to be observed by the theorist. If, for example, 'freedom of choice' is asserted to be a postulate of moral conduct, then this concept must be limited to what is required to make sense of *moral conduct*. In other words, this sort of theorist, in exploring a set of postulates, must deny himself the luxury of an unconditional examination of them. He is occupying and exploring a conditional platform of understanding, the conditions being in some way supplied by the 'fact' to be understood. The 'fact' itself, being, of course, an understanding.

Let me give you another brief example of what I mean by this kind of 'theorizing'.

Let us suppose that the 'fact' of experience is recognized as the performance of a ritual, and, on closer inspection, is identified as a religious ritual – the Mass. This 'fact' of experience is, up to a point, intelligible; it is a combination of individually recognizable, identifiable movements and utterances. Yet, clearly it is also waiting to be understood: there is mystery to be dispelled. How can it become more intelligible? What is there for a 'theorist' to do? What questions can he seek answers to?

Well, to begin with, recognizing this as a performance of ordered movements, he may ask himself: What rules are being followed? The answer to this question will not be achieved without enquiry, because what is going on does not explicitly announce the rules, if any, being followed: indeed, the *theoros* may have to make the rules – that is to say, there may be no rule book in which they are formulated. But if he can see what is going on in terms of rules recognized as reasons for what is going on, he certainly understands this 'fact' of experience better.

But what else may he do? He may ask: what are the postulates of this performance? But what are these postulates? Surely, they are beliefs. And what the theorist has now undertaken to do is to uncover the beliefs which may be given as the reasons both for what he sees to be going on and for the rules which he thinks are being followed. And these beliefs require to be uncovered because they are only referred to, not enunciated, in what is going on. In short, the 'theory' of this ritual is a 'theology' – a set of theological 'theorems' required to make sense of what is going on.

But if this theology *is* to make sense of what is going on, what is going on itself provides limits within which the theologian must work. The beliefs he offers as reasons for what is going on must be related to what is going on and shewn to be related.

This, then, is how I construe the expression 'political theory' or 'theory of politics'. It stands for a genuine but qualified activity of 'theorizing' or 'understanding; the qualification is supplied by the word 'politics', which is neither an arbitrary, nor a systematic qualification. It stands for a 'fact' of experience, recognized, identified, understood. And the most extended understanding of this fact of experience is in terms of its necessary postulates.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[i] LSE 1/1/54. Autograph.

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Political Thought as a Subject of Historical Enquiry

I want this afternoon to take up a problem we have already met in considering the history of science and the history of philosophy. Every piece of historical writing purports to be a certain sort of enquiry about some not yet understood passage of past human engagement. In it a subject of enquiry is provisionally identified: thus, the conquest of Peru, the Reformation in Zürich, Elizabethan drama, [logical positivism],[ii] 'the Scientific revolution', or Jerusalem under the High Priests. And it is identified as a subject of historical enquiry.

The formal characteristics of a subject of historical enquiry can be set out briefly as follows:

1. It is a situation in the past which has not survived, assignable in terms of place and time: place and time being, not so much *there* and *then*, as a context of other related occurrences or situations. [It is a something on the wing. Thus, it is not a changeless self-identity, like the concept of 'freedom', or 'pleasure', or 'art', but a differentiated identity – like 'the freedom of the seas', or the manufacture of Turkish delight, or 'the art of the miniaturist'.][iii]
2. This situation is recognized not merely to have occurred, but to be itself an outcome or an event. It is to be understood in terms of the changes which mediated its eventuality and composed its historical character.
3. These mediating conditions are understood to be themselves other and antecedent events; and consequently a subject of historical enquiry is itself recog-

nized as a convergence of related events, each understood as the difference it made in the passage of continuous change which constitutes this convergence.

4. The relationship between these events is not logical, [or demonstrative][iv] or causal, or functional or systematic, or in terms of their conceptual resemblance; it is a contingent and evidential relationship (what touched what and made a difference). And this continuity of change is not [organic, or][v] teleological, or an evolutionary process; it is a continuity of circumstantially related events any of which is eligible to become a component of an unlimited number of other such continuities of change in each of which it will have a different significance.

What one expects from a historian is, then, that he should lay before us a somehow identified human situation, that he will translate it into an historical event by revealing it as the outcome of a contingent continuity of related events, and that he will make known to us not only his conclusions but also how he arrived at them.

II

[A subject of historical enquiry, then, is not a *datum*, something given merely to be accepted. It is itself the product of an engagement in historical enquiry. An historian may be offered the Fall of Constantinople, the Bank of England or an intellectual adventure like the so-called French 'Enlightenment', but his business is to pick it up and take hold of it in an historical manner; that is, to recognize it as a situation to be translated into an event and to be made intelligible as a passage of related events. In every historical enquiry there is the continuous recognition that what is being done is making and re-making the subject of enquiry.[vi]

[But an historian may be called upon to exercise this responsibility not only continuously *from* the beginning of his enquiry, but *at* the beginning of it in the way he picks up and takes hold of what he has chosen to concern himself with.

The world he inhabits is full of suggestions for enquiry: the liturgy of the Mass, the design of a Persian carpet, a document such as Domesday Book, or a piece of writing which purports to expound the doctrine of the divine right of Kings to rule, or the ruins of a Roman temple. But if he accepts any such offer his business is to recognize it, to pick it up and to take hold of it in an 'historical' manner; that is, as an occurrence to be made intelligible in terms of its contingent connections with other such occurrences. He must recognize it formally as an outcome, an eventuality. And this may entail giving it a character somewhat different from that in which it has immediately offered itself to him. There are 'goings-on' which readily evoke historical enquiry (e.g., an exhibit in a museum), and others which call for some readjustment of attention if they are to be thought of historically (e.g., something that reaches us as an object of current utility, or immediate enjoyment – a bicycle, a song – or in terms of its truth or falsehood, an argument) but nothing does so unless it is made to do so.

Magna Carta, for example, is a document which was, so to say, on offer for about five centuries. From time to time it was picked up by lawyers in the courts, by politicians, by legend-makers, by political mythologists and by constitutional theorists. It was used as an authority to legitimate a current claim or as evidence of a current right or as the announcement of a duty and in this respect it was referred to only yesterday by the Lord Chancellor when speaking about the duties of magistrates when there is a strike of court ushers. But it is fair to say that it was not picked up, recognized as an historical situation, given an historical identity and made the subject of an historical enquiry until towards the end of the nineteenth century. In setting out, then, an historian has to do two distinguishable things. First, from all that falls within his experience he must choose a 'something' to be interested in, a 'going-on' distinguished from all others and identified. And secondly, he has to pick it up and take hold of it in an historical manner. That is, he must think of it as an eventuality – a 'going on' to be made intelligible in terms of the difference it made in a continuity of contingently related occurrences.][vii]

Now, I want to consider what may be called the first stage in an historical enquiry. Such an enquiry must begin with a situation which, in order to be picked up and taken hold of, must be recognized in terms of some distinguishing marks. They may be many or few, precise or somewhat vague, but they delineate a 'something' in terms which at least distinguish a *this* from a *that*. [In an historical enquiry this is only a beginning which will eventually be modified in the course of the enquiry. But it is not an unimportant beginning because it indicates the continuity of change in which the situation is to be placed in order to be understood as an historical event.][viii]

For the most part, historians distinguish their subjects of enquiry in terms of the marks of identity used in common discourse. A history of the game of cricket may be expected to be an enquiry of a certain sort about what is ordinarily called 'cricket'. And an historian of the exploration of Africa will not be expected to identify either 'exploration' or 'Africa' in other than commonly accepted terms. But he may wish to make a distinction (not always observed in common speech) between, for example, travellers, traders, prospectors, missionaries and explorers properly speaking. Although if he is too fussy, he may find his subject dissolve because there were no, or only a couple of, explorers properly speaking; the exploration of the African continent turning out to be the by-product of other, perhaps missionary or trading, engagements.

Again, 'England' is a problematic expression if one chooses to make it so. But which of the authors of histories of 'England' spent sleepless nights puzzling over this identity? They easily recognize the propriety of the expressions 'Roman Britain' and 'Norman England' (It would be anachronistic to speak of 'Roman England'). And an historian, like J.R. Green, who chooses a marginally unusual expression to identify his subject of enquiry, calling his work *A History of the English People*, does not expect the words he uses – 'English' and 'People' – to be understood in any other way in that which they are commonly understood. There are no complicated ethnographic or anthropological overtones in the words 'English' and 'People'. It means you or me and those who lived here abouts in former times. [Nevertheless, even if common parlance harmlessly supplies the identification of many subjects of historical enquiry, some such identifications may prove themselves to be seriously misleading. Not long ago an historian in search of a subject of enquiry found himself stopped by the expression 'gun-boat diplomacy'; here, it seemed, was a subject not only for modish indignation but for historical investigation. But when he looked into the matter he discovered that none of the diplomatic passages commonly identified in these terms involved that particular class of vessel known to the Navy as a 'gun-boat', and that many were military rather than naval occasions. Consequently, he had to look for an indication of what he was to explore in terms other than those of the presence or absence of a 'gun-boat'. His concern was with diplomacy of a certain sort (or perhaps not even with 'diplomacy'), but it required to be identified in terms other than 'gun-boats'. And this was not unimportant because he, like any other historian, relied upon the terms in which he identified his enquiry for telling him where he might begin to look for his evidence: it would be no good looking for this in Admiralty records of the movements and stations of 'gun-boats'; clearly he must look elsewhere.

Where, then, common parlance supplies the identification of a subject of historical enquiry, such an identity cannot be merely accepted by an historian. It must be inspected with some care. And, since it constitutes the terms in which he is to pick up and take hold of what he is to investigate, he must be master of it; and this mastery is the outcome of at least some measure of critical reflection. Moreover, there are some occasions when a subject of historical enquiry must wait upon considerable reflection even for its identification. It was only in a feat of critical imagination (which we now take for granted) that historians came to identify a 'going-on' in the second and third centuries A.D. as a *Völkerwanderung* – a migration of peoples. The expression – indicating a nomadic movement of human beings – came, of course, from common parlance; but it was an historian who chose it, and chose it as much for what it excluded as for what it positively signified. And if, later, and with no very strict regard for evidence, this identity was taken over by historians concerned to elucidate the seventh century movement of Arab peoples, the ninth century movement of Scandanavian peoples and even the Western movement of the so-called American frontier – that is the sort of thing which happens when an identity is turned into a formula and used uncritically.][ix]

Now, let us consider an historian in a somewhat more difficult position; one presented with a subject of enquiry whose identity, although pointed to in an expression of ordinary discourse, is nevertheless dreadfully indistinct and notably ambiguous: 'education', for example.

The word 'education', without a context to bring it down to earth and locate it, is no more than a range of possible references. And for an historian, looking for something which he can confidently pick up and seek to translate into a continuity of contingently related events assignable in place and time, it is almost unrecognizable. Indeed, he may be expected to stay away from it as something quite unmanageable, saying perhaps: 'I can identify "English Grammar Schools in the sixteenth century", "the cloister schools of the Carolingian Empire", "the University of Paris in the fifteenth century", "Charlotte Mason and the Parents National Education Union of 1906", or "the education of a Mandarin in Confucian China" – none of these require me to identify "education". But if you want from me a history of "Education", where do I begin?' His problem is so different from that of an historian of 'Coal Mining in the Mendips' that he might be excused for thinking that it is a problem of another kind, calling for something much more than the mere identification of a situation.

Nor is this difficulty merely on account of the magnitude of the proposed subject of historical enquiry. It is a difficulty encountered by every historian who sets himself the task of investigating an identity whose identifying marks are [themselves, not 'essentially contested' (as Gallie says), but][x] highly abstract, speculative and perhaps essentially evaluative [and uncertain.][xi] Consider it as it appears on a smaller scale, but not less decisively, in an historical enquiry concerning literature.

[In Germany, early in the nineteenth century, there emerged a kind of literary product which came to be called *die Novelle*: a story of a very particular sort. And when later it became the subject of literary-historical enquiry, the task of identifying *die Novelle* and distinguishing it from other sorts of story was imposed upon historians of literature. And the now many historians of the German *Novelle* usually devote a first chapter to this enterprise, because their subject of enquiry does not come to them already identified. To be sure, the term became a literary common place and some authors announced pieces of their writing as *Novellen;* but this is insignificant. What is required are some recognizable marks of identity in terms of which to distinguish *die Novelle.* And there lies the difficulty. For this identity cannot be determined by inspecting pieces of writing unless we know already what we are looking for, and an historian cannot merely stipulate an identity in terms of arbitrarily chosen marks of recognition. Further, these marks of identity must be such as to distinguish a *this* from a *that,* and they must be such that a piece of writing may have some but not all and still be recognizable as a *Novelle,* and such that they may both change (within limits) and be capable of appearing in different forms and different degrees. For, whatever else it is, *die Novelle* for a literary historian is something on the wing; it is something that both changes and remains the same. In short, the historian of a literary genre, such as *die Novelle,* has got to constitute his subject for himself in a procedure of reflection [the hermeneutic circle][xii] the outcome of which is an identity composed of characteristics of unequal importance and capable of appearing in a piece of writing in different degrees.

Thus, *die Novelle* has been identified as a story, usually short, the scene of which is every-day life (not arcadia or fairyland) and in which the narrator is one of the characters. It is concerned with persons, but with what happens to them rather than their actions or characters. And it always has one particular occurrence which constitutes a decisive 'turning-point'. This *Wendepunct* may be a small or a large incident, but it always has the quality of strangeness or unexpectedness. In relation to the person or persons concerned it is represented as the product of chance or fortune, not character; but what upon the surface appears accidental is transformed into an unforseen but inevitable destiny. The *Stimmung* of a *Novelle* is that of fatality: Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* for example.

And all this is important for the historian because it determines the particular continuity of literary change which constitutes his subject of enquiry. It was in consequence of this identification of *die Novelle* that its historians came to understand it as belonging to a literary *genre* which goes back, in some respects, to Boccaccio's 'Decameron' in the fourteenth century.][xiii]

Consider the enterprise of Owen Chadwick in a recent book called *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*. His task is to pick out from all the vast diversity of intellectual change in that century, and to trace the emergence and fortunes, of a distinct strand of intellectual change identified as 'secularization'. The word is a commonplace; but it is vague and riddled with ambiguity. Here it must be made to stand for something distinct and something related to a place and a time and perhaps an identifiable set of persons. And when a reviewer of the book complains that the author 'never faces the obligation of providing a systematic and explicit definition of secularization' we may think that this is demanding a little too much, but we can see that at least something of the sort is required to make the book a recognizable historical enquiry and not a scrap-book [of Victoriana]. [xiv]

Or, here is the problem as Dilthey presents it in respect of an historical enquiry concerned with religion. Such an enquiry, he says, cannot get off the ground unless it has, what he calls, a 'well-grounded concept' of religion to work with. But we cannot get such a concept unless we can identify the thoughts, beliefs or situations which are to be regarded as 'religious'. And in order to identify a belief as a 'religious' belief we need a concept of religion. How may we escape from this impasse?

Subjects of historical enquiry, then, need to be identified. And the more they approach the condition of an intellectual situation – men thinking and expressing themselves in words – the more difficult their identification becomes. [And this seems to me the main difference between what may be called a history of 'doings' and a history of men thinking where the occurrences to be related to one another are the utterances of thoughts which have no immediately discoverable references or unmistakable form.

Consider the task of trying to understand historically what is called the *Enlightenment* in eighteenth century France. It is true that the historian is given something of a start: 'enlightenment' was a term of contemporary self-identification. But his task is to discover what these writers meant by this self-identification, how it connects with earlier self-identifications (such as that of the *illuminati* of the Italian Renaissance) and the succession of intellectual enterprises it composed, each unfolding itself out of what went before. He is concerned with what purports to be a distinguishable strand of thought and this entails identifying writers and sets of writers in terms of their puzzles, questions, beliefs, doctrines, intellectual interests, and dispositions. And this cannot be done without some over-all understanding of this alleged movement of thought, an understanding which both derives from and gives meaning to the details: thus, the so-called 'hermeneutic circle'. The identity of 'the Enlightenment' is problematic, and a too hasty identification (like that of Peter Gay, which fixes only upon its opposition to Christianity) may wreck the whole enterprise. To embark upon a history of the English wool trade in the fifteenth century is to be anchored to a relatively unmistakable and unproblematic identity as the focus of historical attention; but the identity of the French Enlightenment, of Christian theology or Neoplatonism hardly exist until a reflective historian has made them.][xv]

To embark upon a history of mediaeval Venetian glass-blowing is to be anchored to a relatively unmistakable identity, one of whose identifying marks is simply that it took place on one particular island in the Venetian archipelago – the island of Murano. But the identity of 'Liberalism' hardly exists before a reflective historian has got to work. And by then its 'identity' and its 'history' have become indistinguishable.

Or, looked at from the point of view of the reader: I am not likely to be puzzled by the identity in *A History of Corfu*; it is the island, its changing inhabitants and their changing fortunes. But the reader of Lange's *History of Materialism*, or Lecky's *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, will get nowhere unless he can perceive what Lange means by 'materialism' and Lecky by 'rationalism'. And these are inherently changing and ambiguous identities, difficult to pin down as historical continuities of change.

III

I want now to consider the predicament of an historian of what is called 'political thought'. I believe it to be more severe than that of any other historian. And I shall suggest, in the end, that he may perhaps be better advised to avoid it in some intellectually respectable manner than to try and overcome it, because there is no way of resolving it definitively.

Here, then, are five historical enquiries: *A History of Greek Political Thought*; *A History of Political Thought in the Middle Ages*; *A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century*; *A History of the Political Thought of the German Romantics*; and a work called *The Evolution of Political Thought in the West*. Each of these titles is a brief announcement of the historical identity the author proposes to explore.

One item in each of these specifications is easily understood except by the totally uninformed. 'Greek', 'Middle Ages', 'Sixteenth Century', 'German Romantics', 'the West'. Two of them refer to a period of time measured on a calendar, and all historical identities have a dimension of this sort. 'Greek' – a language, certainly; here probably something more, but what more it is not difficult to understand. 'German Romantics', again an identification in terms of who, when, and where, although it suggests a difficulty: what exactly is a 'Romantic'. And 'the West?' If the historian had been writing at another time – say in the seventh century – 'the West' might distinguish the Latin from the Greek world. But here, we may guess, 'the West' is a piece of fairly commonplace self-identification appropriated by an historian. The identity it points to is, perhaps, a trifle theoretic – a mixture of time, place and what may be called a 'civilization': perhaps the historian's own civilization (he was an American). But whatever refinements the author has in mind, 'the West' conveys a recognizable *this* and not *that*, a focus of attention upon Rome, Paris and New York, not Persia, Moscow or Peking.

Four of the books announce themselves as 'histories'. Exactly what this will mean to the reader is difficult to say. But it is intended as a mark of identification and it may be taken to mean that the author understands himself to be exploring a continuity of contingently related intellectual changes. The fifth title substitutes the word 'Evolution' for the word 'history': *The Evolution of Political Thought in the West*. It strikes an odd note. It is puzzling. Does the author think of 'political thought in the West' as a biological organism? But it may turn out that the word 'evolution' here means nothing in particular: just a modish alternative for the word 'history'.

But there is an expression common to all five of these titles: 'political thought'. It is the chief indication of the something the historian has distinguished and proposes to explore. And beyond doubt it distinguishes a 'something': if nothing else, it is an announcement of a concern with 'intellectual history' – a history of men thinking. But does it do anything more? Or how is this expression 'political thought' to be understood if it is to identify a subject of historical enquiry?

It is composed of an adjective purporting to qualify a noun. But if we compare it with what appear to be similarly constructed expressions – Christian theology, Cartesian philosophy, Newtonian physics, Greek medicine, pre-Raphaelite art, Romantic poetry – its message is certainly less distinct. But does it go any appreciable distance towards identifying a distinct continuity of intellectual change? I doubt it. Briefly, the noun 'thought' is woefully imprecise when compared with the words 'theology', 'philosophy', 'physics', 'medicine', or 'poetry' in the other expressions. And the adjective 'political' does little to abate the mystery: it is dreadfully vague when compared with the words 'Christian', 'Cartesian', 'Newtonian', 'Romantic', etc. in the other expressions. And in order to explain this doubt I want to consider the situation of an historian who intends to concern himself with 'political thought' and is in search of an identity to correspond with this expression, an identity which he can recognize as a continuity of contingently related intellectual changes.

IV

Both 'political' and 'thought' are words which denote identities which our historian finds ready to hand – like 'Newtonian' and 'physics', but less distinct. Why should not an historian accept them as J.R. Green accepted 'the English people' or another historian might accept the expression 'the Mormon Church' as a subject of historical enquiry? Let us suppose that he decides to do so. What happens?

(1) By and large the word 'politics' as it appears in ordinary discourse has some distinct meaning which may be picked up by an historian. We know what it includes and what it excludes in much the same way and with the same

degree of exactness as we know what is included in 'farming' or 'shopkeeping'. We recognize Pericles, Simon de Montfort and Senator McCarthy as 'politicians' and we have no difficulty in distinguishing them in this respect from Euclid, St John of the Cross and Darwin. No doubt there are ambiguous characters (Vanessa Redgrave or Savonarola, for example), but we have little difficulty in recognizing this ambiguity. We recognize the Roman Senate and the Rockingham Whig Party as political institutions, and the Jockey Club and the Plymouth Brethren as something else. We recognize the Treaty of Triannon as a political instrument and a motor car insurance policy as an instrument of another sort. We have little difficulty in distinguishing 'political' utterances from utterances of another sort: a speech in Parliament by Lord Shelburne is *prima facie* politics, and a letter of his to Lady Caroline Lamb is not. We know the difference between the stage and a political platform, but this does not prevent us from recognizing the first performance of Victor Hugo's 'Hernani' as a political occurrence that shook the Second French Empire, or from recognizing the Abbey Theatre in Dublin as perhaps more of a political institution than anything else.

Of course, reliance upon common parlance will throw up some difficulties. Prestige words in a political vocabulary, a word like 'democracy', get bandied about and corrupted. When we meet them we cannot be certain that they have anything to do with politics. We need take no notice of those who declare that 'everything is politics'; but the view that there is nothing which may not, in certain circumstances, be 'politics' is less easily ignored. However, in general we have a not wholly unreliable set of marks of identity to distinguish 'politics'. And the fact that there is no vocabulary of uniquely political words is not peculiar to 'politics'.

(2) Secondly, what is the identity denoted by the word 'thought', ready-made and available to be picked up and used by an historian to identify 'political thought' as a subject of enquiry? It will, no doubt include sentiments, beliefs, opinions, doubts, visions, exclamations, ideas, systems of ideas, doctrines, manifestos, propositions, ideologies, guesses, arguments, scientific theorems, designs, plans, ideals, wants, intentions etc. – in short, mental dispositions, constructions and exploits of all kinds, usually expressed in

words. And if we ask: What are the lines which, in general, delineate this identity 'thought'? I suppose the answer would be that they are lines, sometimes a trifle indistinct, shaky and intermittent, which, on one side, exclude merely physical movements or organic impulses, and on the other side exclude natural objects as such. In short, this identification of 'thought' is notably vague and informal, but not so precarious as to offer an historian of 'political thought' nothing whatever to go upon.

These, then, are the rough identifications of 'political' and 'thought' which common discourse has to offer an historian of 'political thought'. If he accepts them, as J.R. Green accepted his expression 'the English People', his history will be an enquiry concerned with 'thought' (as it has been identified) about 'politics' (as it has been identified). And no doubt he will add something to indicate a time and a place.

But such a history of 'political thought', although it is not totally indiscriminate, is, on the briefest inspection, always on the verge of disintegration on account of the manner in which 'political thought' has been identified. Look at the index of any history written roughly on these principles – say, Sabine: it contains pretty well everything that has ever entered anybody's head, from Aristotle to Lumumba, from Nominalism to the changing price of bacon. What this specification of 'political thought' allows to be embraced – everything from the Constitution of the United States to the ravings of a *dervish* – can hardly compose anything ressembling a continuity of intellectual change. In the expression 'political thought' here the adjective does not qualify the noun in the intelligible manner that 'Babylonian' may qualify 'astrology' or 'Christian' may qualify 'theology'. And the noun itself is dreadfully indistinct.

V

Now, let us imagine an historian, disappointed at finding himself where his acceptance of these identifications of 'politics' and 'thought' have brought him and determined to seek something more precise. And let us suppose his revulsion from his situation is so great that he swings to the opposite extreme. In these circumstances he might be found saying to himself something like this: 'Let me not try to improve these fatally vague identifications. Let me be done with all identifications, which are never more than somewhat arbitrary aids to recognition. What I need is a "definition" or "concept" of politics as the subject of my history. First the adjective and then the noun, first "political" and then "thought", must be *definitively* understood'. This is the situation Dilthey put before us in respect of religion. What then?

(1) Recognizing that the task of devising a 'definition' or 'concept' of politics is a toilsome undertaking which might take him the rest of his life, we may suppose him to have recourse to the writings of the theorists. And of the many different concepts they yield, let us select four:

> Politics is 'the exercise of power'
> Politics is 'the contest to fill the decision-making roles in a society'
> Politics is 'the authoritative allocation of values in a society'
> Politics is 'the determination of who gets what, when, and how'

Now, each of these propositions, and their like, purports to distinguish a general definitive character in the somewhat miscellaneous ideas, actions and utterances which belong to ordinary notions of politics. And equipped with such a definition our historian's task is to turn over the records of human thoughts looking for beliefs, opinions, doctrines, dreams, theorems, mental constructions and adventures concerned with, say, 'the authoritative allocation of values in a society', and then to make historical sense of what he has found. In place of an ability roughly to identify 'the political', he has a 'concept' of politics as his subject of enquiry.

(2) Nevertheless, his task of turning over the records of human 'thought' concerned with his 'concept' of politics is still an ambiguous undertaking. And to escape his ambiguity what he needs is a 'concept' of 'thought' to match his concept of 'politics'.

What exactly this entails may only be conjectural. But it would seem that what this historian is looking for is what may be called a 'phenomenology of thought' – that is, an understanding of human discourse in terms of the different, logically distinct, modes of thought it employs. And in looking for this he may find a variety of conclusions opening up before him.

The conclusion, for example, that there are several categorially distinct modes of thought – e.g. philosophical, scientific, historical, moral, prudential, etc. And that since each of these may concern itself with 'politics', there can be no such thing as political thought without further qualification. There will be as many histories of political thought as there are different ways of thinking about 'politics', each yielding independent continuities of intellectual change.

Or the conclusion that these alleged different modes of thought are in fact reducible to but one valid mode of thought – say, 'scientific' thinking; and that consequently a serious history of political thought must be a history of 'scientific' thinking about politics.

Or, the conclusion, which Skinner and some other historians of political thought seem to have reached, namely that all political thought is necessarily what is called ideological; propositions and arguments designed to justify and make respectable the pursuit of the satisfaction of a 'political' want.

Or – perhaps a surprising conclusion, but nevertheless one which has been reached – that the word 'politics' does not stand for a specific human activity capable of being thought about in a variety of different ways, but itself denotes a mode of thought in terms of which anything and everything may be thought: that is, attributing to the adjective 'political' the same sort of meaning as, for example, the adjectives 'philosophical' or 'scientific' or 'historical'.

But instead of following our historian in his attempt to base his enquiry upon a concept of 'thought' qualified by a concept of 'politics', I shall ask whether, perhaps, he has not taken the wrong road. He has assumed, or conjectured, that he would be on safer ground as an historian if he could 'define' his subject of enquiry. But the truth is, I think, that he would find any such definition profoundly misleading and unusable.

His business as an historian of political thought is to try to understand and display an intellectual situation in terms of the antecedents which made it historically what it was, which converged to constitute its historical character. But where this intellectual situation is conceptually 'defined', the only relevant antecedents will be those which are conceptually affiliated to it. And in place of a passage of intellectual change composed of contingently related intellectual events, he will have only a changeless situation surrounded by other situations recognized solely in terms of approximation to or divergence from it.

This is the position Gierke got himself into when dealing with the modern history of the idea of a contract of government. He began by supposing that what he needed was a 'well-grounded concept' of the contractual authority of government. Having achieved this, he then went to the literature and discovered that there was one writer – Althusius – whose idea of contractual government corresponded to this ideal model. And Gierke's history of the notion of contractual government consisted in an account of various writers whom he understood solely in respect of the divergence of their writings from this ideal model. The writers before Althusius were taken to be trying but failing to achieve what Althusius had achieved; and the writers who came after were considered only according to how closely they adhered to *the* model contract theory in all its logically necessary parts. In short, instead of finding a number of writers using the language of contractualism and asking himself what are they trying to do with this language and why? (each one something different) Gierke could only see them as writers circling round this single 'well-grounded concept' of a contract of government.

Or, a would-be historian of European education may find himself offered a concept of education. James Mill will tell him that 'education is learning to be an instrument of happiness first to oneself and next to other beings'. But, to an offer of this kind, our historian may be expected to say something like this: 'Yes, no doubt what you say is true. But I am concerned with the circumstantial emergence and the fortunes of evanescent beliefs about what in detail has been taught and learned in schools (Latin, civics or arithmetic), with the actual institutions and methods of learning in which these beliefs have from time to time been reflected, with the historical meanings of such contingent expressions as "a liberal education" or "a modern education" which have been thrown up on the way, and so on. Indeed, I do not see how I can reduce all these beliefs, enterprises, designs and circumstances to a single continuity of related changes, much less understand them to be ringing the changes on the abstract notion of "happiness". Consequently I have decided to confine my enquiry to something else, namely, say, the emergence of the study of modern languages in English schools and French *Lycées* in the late nineteenth century, or Frederick the Great's reform of the village schools of Prussia [and the decline in the study of ancient languages. Consequently, my dear philosopher, you can see for yourself that your concept of "education" (or any other such concept) is quite worthless to me, either in identifying my subject of enquiry or in exploring it'].[xvi]

What an historian needs, then, and all he can use, is some sort of temporary identification of his subject of enquiry which displays it as something on the wing and does not stand in the way of his engagement to transform it into a difference thrown up in a passage of evanescent, contingently related intellectual changes.

So it is with historians of political thought. Some have believed the expression 'political thought' itself identifies a separate and coherent continuity of intellectual change. This reflects the convenience of being able to distinguish between different intellectual engagements. But when these convenient compartments are given the status of changeless conceptual self-identities – science, religion or politics –we have set out on the road to ruin. Our histories of political thought have become no better than scrap-books of deceptively similar intellectual adventures. The expression 'political thought', by itself, is incapable of identifying the constituents of any continuity of intellectual change, much less a distinguishable mode of thought; and it is so liable to mislead an historian and obstruct his enquiry that he is well advised to avoid getting himself involved in the difficult problems of definition which this expression is erroneously supposed to solve. Forget it: it has become a portmanteaux expression meaning next to nothing.

In order to trace the modern history of reflection on, say, the character of a parliamentary representative and to account for the changing notions of his office, one does not have to think of oneself as doing the history of 'political thought' and it does not help to do so. And a writer who calls his book *The Classical Republicans of the Seventeenth Century* does not need to tell us, in addition, that it is a history of political thought. The word 'republican' tells us all we need to know, and neither he nor his readers have to confuse themselves with a general identification of 'the political', let alone a concept of 'politics'. And there are some well-known ways in which historians have dispensed with this embarrassing expression.

(1) For example, an historian may concern himself with a particular piece of writing. His business is to understand what is before him, its various ideas, arguments and manners of argument as an example of a man thinking in the exact continuity of intellectual changes which it itself demands in order to be historically understood. Gewirth has done this with the *Defensor Pacis* of Marsilius of Padua, Dietze with the *Federalist Papers*. Each is a piece of genuine intellectual history, largely because the question asked is not 'Is this a piece of "political thought"?', but 'What are these writers thinking about and how did they come to be thinking about it in this way?'

(2) Alternatively, an historian may identify a continuity of intellectual change in terms of a theme or a doctrine. Here he must take some trouble to identify his theme, but a concept of 'politics' will not help him. This is what Cohen did in *The Pursuit of the Millenium* which turned out to be a sixteenth-century chapter in the history of gnostic belief. It is what Woodhouse does in *Puritanism and Liberty* and Shirley Letwin in *The Pursuit of Certainty*. Each is concerned with a continuity of intellectual change specified in far more distinct [exact][xvii] and local terms than any concept of 'politics' suggests.

(3) A third possibility is for an historian to identify his continuity of intellectual change in terms of an argument or a passage in an extended argument; that is, assignable writers addressing themselves to a common problem. This is what Black does in *Monarchy and Community* which is concerned with the debate carried on in the Council of Basle. It is what Pocock does in *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, and what Shapiro does in his study of nineteenth century Russian writers concerned with what they identify as the 'autocracy' of the Tsars. He does not seek a well-grounded concept of 'politics' or even of 'autocracy'; he is concerned only with how those writers use the word.

(4) Or again, among a larger and miscellaneous collection of dreams, visions, designs, plans, enquiries etc, some with-

out even a familial likeness to others, which may be said to compose 'political thought', an historian may distinguish (in terms of place or time) a single strand of reflection: the reflection which was concerned to understand an emergent pattern of conduct such as the ancient Greek *polis*; the reflection which, from the sixteenth century, was devoted expressly to seeking an answer to the question, What is France?; or Levenson's *Confucian China and its Modern Fate*.

These, then, are some of the ways in which 'political thought' may become a subject of historical enquiry. And one of their virtues is that they do not entail any general identification of 'the political', much less a concept of 'politics'.

In short, while an historian of Mexico or even of 'Platonism' begins with a relatively unpuzzling situation, and an historian of 'philosophy' or 'chemistry' has some puzzles which he may hope to solve as he goes along, the historian of 'political thought' is in a desperate situation. He is at sea in the dark, without compass or sextant. He had much better settle for an historical enquiry about the meaning and use of the expression 'reason of state', about the notion of 'nationalism' in modern Europe, about 'Renaissance Diplomacy', or about Women's Lib.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[i] LSE 1/1/27. Photocopy, of a typescript with autograph corrections. See the introduction for a note on the composition of this paper.

[ii] Inserted from version dated '1979 1980'.

[iii] Inserted from undated version.

[iv] Deleted in MS.

[v] Inserted from version dated '1979 1980'.

[vi] Inserted from version dated '1979 1980'.

[vii] Inserted from undated version.

[viii] Inserted from version dated '1979 1980'.

[ix] Inserted from undated version.

[x] Inserted from version dated '1979 1980'.

[xi] Inserted from version dated '1979 1980'.

[xii] Inserted from version dated '1979 1980', deleted in MS.

[xiii] Inserted from version dated '1979 1980'.

[xiv] Deleted in MS.

[xv] Inserted from undated version.

[xvi] Deleted in MS.

[xvii] Inserted from version dated '1979 1980'.

Twenty-nine

Law

'Law' is an ambiguous word. It is used to denote patterns of physical change and the alleged invariable (and calculably probable) relations between specified phenomena (e.g. the 'laws of nature', Kepler's laws of planetary movement, Gresham's Law and even Grimm's law relating to changes in Germanic languages); and it also denotes laws relating to human conduct declaring what is or is not permissible (e.g. 'Roman Law' or 'criminal law').

We are concerned only with the second meaning of the word. But this also is ambiguous. It is made to stand for ordinances, edicts, orders, commands, precepts etc., and also for rules properly speaking. We are concerned with law understood as rules properly speaking relating to human conduct.

Such rules have certain distinguishing characteristics and invoke the following considerations.

1. They have an ascertainable jurisdiction. That is, they relate to an exclusive collection of persons who are said to be 'under the law' and who are expressly associated in terms of these rules: indistinguishable legal *personae*.

2. The common character of such persons is an imputed knowledge of what this law requires and an obligation to conform their conduct to these conditions. The counterpart of this obligation is the recognition, not of the propriety or of the 'justice' of these rules, but of their authority or authenticity. This authority is to be understood in terms of the official character attributed to the makers and custodians of the rules and to the procedures concerned, and it may be formulated in constitutional rules of recognition.

3. These rules assume persons perpetually engaged, independently or in partnerships, in responding to their understood situations with chosen actions and utterances designed (well or ill) to procure wished-for satisfactions.

They govern 'practical' activity. They exist in advance of, and are unqualified by, any occasion of such activity.

4. These rules relate to the how, the when, the where and to the circumstances of conduct, not to its substantive purposes or its consequences. They are procedural and constitute a 'practice' of moral (that is, non-instrumental and non-prudential) qualifications to be taken account of and observed in considering and determining what shall be done or said. Unlike commands, instructions etc. which require specific substantive responses, rules are not obeyed or disobeyed, they may only be adequately or inadequately subscribed to.

5. The exercise of the authority to make or to have the custody of laws and the obligation to subscribe to what they require are alike in being engagements insulated from any concern to recognize or to promote any substantive interest. Since a rule properly speaking 'imposes' a moral consideration which is not itself a substantive interest, to be endowed with the authority to make a rule is not merely to be trusted not to use it for the promotion of an interest of one's own; to do so would be to deny the engagement to make rules and to abdicate the office, just as bribery contradicts (and does not merely qualify) judicial decision. And similarly, the engagement to make rules is logically insulated from any concern with the substantive interests of others. Thus, rule-making is not a disinterested engagement; that is, one which does not favour one interest more than another: it is an 'interestless' engagement. And further, the obligation to subscribe to what the law requires is not an interest additional to those the pursuit of which constitutes practical activity, it is the recognition of a moral condition imposed upon the pursuit of any and every interest.

6. The fact that a knowledge of the law may be used prudentially in the determination of a course of conduct in pursuit of a substantive satisfaction, does not, of course, endow rules of law themselves with a prudential character or impose upon them the character of instruments designed to promote substantive achievement. The 'purpose' of law, like the purpose of any moral consideration, is internal to itself.

7. Although the conditions which rules of law require to be observed are 'moral' (that is, non-prudential and not designed to promote or to hinder the achievement of

wished-for satisfactions) they do not relate to the motives of actions. Their concern with the manner in which an action is performed is a concern with its intention as revealed in the circumstances of the performance; and this may be extended to cover 'negligence', i.e. failure to observe a certain standard of care.

8. An association constituted in terms of rules may be expected to provide itself with rule-ordered means for detecting failures adequately to subscribe to the conditions of conduct prescribed in the rules and perhaps something to prevent such occurrences. But it *must* have the means of determining whether or not an alleged action involves such a failure: a judicial procedure. Since what has to be determined is the relation of a circumstantially unique action to the conditions imposed by a general rule (and not anything so simple as fitting an action to a command) adjudication is unavoidably an exercise in casuistry. Some cases, e.g. where the attribution of the action and its intention are not in doubt, may be easier to decide than others; but no case decides itself.

9. A penalty may be assigned to a proved failure adequately to subscribe to what the law requires. This, in principle, relates to the illegality itself and is at once a *defence* of the law (a so-called 'sanction') and an emblem of the guilt of the offender. But a variety of circumstantial and even consequential considerations may be involved in determining what the penalty shall be. It may, for example, be related to the alleged 'gravity' of the offense, or even prudentially adjusted to deter others from offending. But it never departs from its character as an 'enforcement of the law'.

The award of damages or compensation to one who has incidentally suffered injury as a consequence of an illegal action is a consideration of a different kind. It is not a 'sanction' of the law, the object of which is not to protect interests, or compensate for injury, but to require adequate subscription to an already announced procedure of conduct. In many cases the damage may be insured against and an award of damages by a court of law would often be worthless if it were not. And, of course, a penalty properly speaking cannot be insured against.

10. Association in terms of the moral-procedural conditions of rules of law properly speaking is a distinct kind of relationship. It is not to be confused with, and it cannot take

the place of, prudential and consequential relationship to promote the satisfaction of self-chosen wants. But although the qualification it imposes upon substantive conduct is a 'moral' qualification (that is, non-prudential), it is not designed to make that conduct more 'virtuous' or to promote less egoistical or more benevolent purposes, nor has it anything to do with the motives of actions. It is designed to qualify the relationship of practical activity by modifying the inherent character of that activity as a relationship of unqualified power to attempt to achieve whatever may be desired; not, of course, to endow every person with an equal power to get what he wants, but to qualify the exercise of power by the imposition of a common procedure. The rule of law, properly speaking, is an exercise of authority in which the power of the subjects of that authority to seek and to obtain the satisfaction of their desires is qualified by the obligation to subscribe to certain moral-procedural conditions while leaving them to choose prudentially for themselves the substantive actions and utterances in which to seek such satisfactions.

11. A State is an association in which, whatever may have been the historical circumstances of its emergence, the only thing its members must have in common is the obligation to recognise the authority of its government.

The idea of a *Rechtsstaat* is that of a State in which the authority of its government is identified as that of making, having the custody of and administering rules of law properly speaking to which the members of the association have an obligation adequately to subscribe in all their conduct: a State recognized as a jurisdiction. The virtue properly attributed to a State of this character is its combination of order and freedom. It stands in contrast to a State understood as a single substantive enterprise or a combination of enterprises, where 'government' is recognized as the authoritative exercise of prudential management.

The notion of a *Rechtsstaat* is not a sudden ideological invention. It has long been an element in European political thought, slowly identified and often improperly confused with the notion of 'democratic' government. But a State of this character has never in fact existed and it could never subsist without qualification. It has, for example, no means of relating itself to other States (it could not conduct a foreign policy); and it is difficult to recognize a tax law as a law properly speaking. But approximations to it have existed or have been conceived in which the necessary or the desirable qualifications of the strict rule of law (even its official extreme indifference to the substantive fortunes or misfortunes of its members) have neither formally nor in practice destroyed its character.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[1] Private collection. Autograph.

Thirty

Europe, the Emergence of an Idea

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1. The engagement in a piece of historical writing is to transform recorded occurrences into events. By an occurrence I mean a happening variously recorded in terms of what it was to those who made it happen, to whom it happened, or those to whom it was a matter of 'concern' (as Heidegger would say). By an event I mean an occurrence made intelligible as the outcome of other occurrences; an eventuality, such as only an historian is interested in making or can make.

An historian will have an expression or name which distinguishes and identifies the occurrence he is to transform into an event: the sack of Rome by the Visi-goths in 476, the Alaskan Gold Rush of 1898, the French Revolution. These identifications of occurrences he will recognize as something he cannot very well do without. He must have a fairly distinct shape upon which to focus his attention. But he will recognize them also as something to beware of. A too distinct or a too shapely identity of this sort may seriously obstruct his task of transformation. It may suggest to him that his engagement is merely that of finding out more about an already settled identity. Indeed, it may lure him into forgetting that his task is to create an historical identity. He may forget that the 'subject' of his investigation is not the occurrence with which he begins but is an event which he is discovering and making as he goes along and that it can appear only at the end of his work. He may forget that for him as an historian *what* happened is nothing other than an answer to the question '*How* did it happen?' How did William of Orange become King of England – not his title – but the actual course of events; and that this question is not answered until he has laid down his pen. In short, historical enquiry is faced with this difficult problem of how to accept an occurrence and at the same time not accept it but turn it into a question; how to accept the 'French Revolution' and yet regard it as historically not yet known or understood.

Now this problem is specially acute in intellectual history. An intellectual occurrence has a very compelling identity; much more so than, for example, the sack of Rome in 476, the indistinctness of which positively invites enquiry: who were the Visigoths? An intellectual occurrence has itself an immediate or discernible intelligibility; it may be recognized, for example, as making sense or it may be written off as an uninteresting superstition. An expression like 'biological evolution' may be so familiar that even an historian may think that all he has to do is to accept it in its character as an answer to a scientific question, to tell us a little more about it in this respect, and perhaps go on to say how cogent an answer it has been thought to be. This, I think is how the idea of 'progress' appears in Bury's book of that title. The idea progress, here, is scarcely even recognized as an answer to a question, much less as answers to half a dozen different questions in relation to each of which it has a different meaning. It is almost like one of Lovejoy's unit ideas: it appears, disappears, reappears, gets caught up in a variety of contexts, but never fails to remain its single self. In the book it is like a butterfly pinned to a board with a label telling us in great detail about its habitat; the work of a lepidopterist of skill and learning. There is, then, in an intellectual occurrence, like *The Origin of Species* or the Nicene Creed, so much to hold the attention that even an historian may think that his business is to fix its shape more firmly rather than to transform it by seeking to understand it as an eventuality; that is, to understand it as the outcome of a continuity of intellectual change.

On the other hand, an historical writer for whom the intellectual occurrence with which he begins is so indistinct that it has no particular shape, is liable never to come up with any noticeable identity. He is like an angler who doesn't know the difference between a fish and an old tin can and doesn't worry about it because his only criterion of relevance is whatever happens to get on his hook. There was a well-known nineteenth century history of philosophy written by G.H. Lewes which displayed not the faintest reflective consideration of the shape and character of philosophical thinking: everything went into the book that had ever enjoyed or usurped the name of philosophy.

One of the interesting features of a piece of intellectual history is, therefore, the manner in which the author manages to overcome this difficulty – the difficulty of having a shapely enough intellectual occurrence and yet one which does not resist the transformation in which it is made to become a continuity of intellectual change: '*what* it is', being found in an answer to the question, *How* did it happen? There is no formula for success; and every success is liable to be a near failure.

How does Hay manage in this respect?

2. His essay on *Europe: the Emergence of an Idea* is designed as a sort of conversation between two complementary themes. Like a good essayist, he does not waste time by telling us what he is going to do or by providing an argument to justify it. And the measure of his success is that, when we come to the end of the essay, it is evident that if he had pursued either of these themes to the exclusion of the other, or if he had taken first one and then the other (instead of winding them together) the result would have been far less impressive than I think it is.

However, our business is to take it to pieces and see how he achieves his result.

(i) The first theme is a study in what is called 'historical semantics': the history of a word in terms of what it has been used to distinguish; a continuity of changing usage.

A word is to be identified in terms of the languages in which it is found and in the uses made of it from time to time by those who speak the languages. These 'uses' are its meanings – the experiences it distinguishes and the questions it purports to answer.

Words, then, (or at least some words), in terms of what they distinguish, offer themselves as changing identities, preeminently suitable to be explored in respect of the continuity of change they exhibit. They never suggest that they can have but one meaning.

The word here is *Europe*. We are told that it first appeared in the Greek language and can be seen there emerging from poetry (where it named a Goddess) into prose in the eighth century B.C. From Greek it passed to the Latin language and thence to the languages of modern times. Its shape (spelling) and sound remained unchanged: even in German it remained the same – *Europa* – one of the comparatively few Latin words in the German language.

In its earliest meaning, in the Greek language, it referred to a geographical region; and it was partnered by the words Asia and Lybia. Asia was the region east of the river Don; Lybia the region south west of the Nile. Europe was west of Asia and north of Lybia.

For the Greeks, Europe was earliest identified with the mainland of Greece. It was a certain kind of self-identification. But later it came to signify all that part of the known world which was neither Asia nor Lybia.

It was a relatively colourless word. If it meant anything more than a geographical region – anything more than a region on the map – it was the suggestion that by reason of its climate it was an agreeable place to live in. It was not like Arabia in which *felix* and *deserta* were distinguished. Europe was all pretty *felix*: fertile and comfortable.

Its early identification with the mainland of Greece endowed it with the vague meaning of the 'home-land' of the Greeks – Asia (identified first with Persia) was 'abroad', 'hostile', 'barbarian', vulgar. Libya was almost unknown.

But all the meaning which went beyond that of referring to a geographical region was soon lost. Alexander's Empire was, geographically, as much in Asia as it was in Europe; the 'Greek' world could not go on being identified as situated in Europe.

The word Europe in Greek, never became an adjective. If it was more than a geographical region it was only in respect of being thought an agreeable geographical region on account of its climate. It was a temporary and rather vague answer to the question: *Where* am I? A self-understanding merely in terms of geography.

The Romans came to know much more about the world than the Greeks, but in Latin *Europa* meant very much the same as the Greek *Europē*: a geographical region partnered by Asia and Africa. The city of Rome itself was in Europe, but the Roman world could not be identified with *Europa*; it lay as much in Asia and Africa as in Europe. Indeed, the ties of Rome with the 'east' were for a long time more durable than its 'European' connection. In short, *Europa* meant something to the Romans but not very much.

The Jews of the eastern Mediterranean were exposed to this way of thinking about the world, but they brought with them some beliefs about the pedigree of the inhabitants of the world which, when grafted on to Greco-Roman geography, endowed the word *Europa* with a new meaning. Briefly, and without the complicated adjustments, the world was peopled by the descendants of the sons of Noah: Shem being the progenitor of the inhabitants of Asia, Ham the father of those of Africa, and Japheth the sire of the inhabitants of Europe: (the 'Gentiles'). Thus, *Europa* came to mean 'the land of Japheth.' And, with the Pentateuch, this meaning passed into Christian thought. *Europa* was not merely a self-identification in terms of place, it was an answer to the question *Who am I*?: Self-identification in terms of place and notional ancestry.

However, from the disintegration of the Roman world, not much is heard of the word 'Europe'. It crops up now and again in its geographical meaning; a chronicler speaks of the mixed army with which Charles Martel defeated the Moslems in northern Spain in 732 as composed of 'Europeans.' The myth that Europe was the land of the descendants of Japheth never died, but it was partnered by other competing beliefs in which the peoples of Europe sought an identity for themselves by appointing other progenitors. A long lasting favourite was the notion that England was inhabited by the descendants of emigrant Trojans who came west after the fall of Troy.

But by the beginning of the thirteenth century, the word Europe was coming back into use with a somewhat new meaning. Instead of being a word used when ancient beliefs about geography were being recalled or when the post-diluvian dispersion of mankind was being speculated about, it was beginning to be used in respect of a *present*, or what was recognized as a fairly recent present. It was coming to signify, first, the 'home-land' of a people: 'Europeans'. And then, gradually, a something in terms of which the people could identify themselves other than their alleged ancestry or geographical habitat: a 'civilization.' In short, it was beginning, but still with very little shape to it, to acquire the meaning which in modern times has eclipsed all others.

There is no need to continue the story in detail. The Europe which emerged in modern times was a manifold of peoples and states, occupying an area between the arctic circle and the northern shore of the Mediterranean, the Urals and the Atlantic, without a common language or law, but with the beginnings of a common experience and not without a certain missionary zeal in making the virtues of this experience or 'culture' available to the rest of the world. But it was not until the eighteenth century that *this* 'Europe' was undeniably established in our vocabulary. And in more recent times it has, for some purposes, given way to the expression 'Western', not in its essentially ambiguous geographical sense but as the identifying word for a civilization.

This, then, is one of Hay's themes. An account of the ideas which the word 'Europe' has signified over a period of about 3000 years. Inevitably a much interrupted story, but the changes it recounts are made historically intelligible. And the evidence? The word in use in writings of every conceivable sort, maps, legal utterances, theological debates, legends, poems, chronicles, plays, everything except (until recent times) the pronouncements of dictionary-makers about how the word is or ought to be used. Johnson's dictionary has no entry under Europe; and the Oxford Dictionary records only the adjective European, which it defines as 'belonging to Europe.'

(ii) The second of Hay's themes is centered not upon a word but upon an idea expressed from time to time in many different words. Each expression of this idea has an idiom of its own, but they all have a familial character: they are brief answers to the same sort of question.

Hay does not venture upon a general characterization of his idea, and he has astutely arranged his essay so that there is no need for him to do so. Briefly, this idea is that of the self-understanding of a people or a collection or an association of peoples.

His first theme, then, is one *word* with changing meanings and, after a time, settling down with a current meaning which expresses not only one of the self-understandings of the inhabitants of geographical 'Europe' but is capable also of embracing a large part of the American continent and elsewhere. And his second theme is not one abstract idea expressed in a variety of words, but a variety of idioms of one idea expressed in a variety of words, and in the end linking us with the word 'Europe'.

It was not the word 'Europe', but the word *Hellas* which expressed the self-identity of the ancient Greeks; a self-identity centred mainly upon a *language*.

It was not *Europa*, but the expressions *populus Romanus* and *Romanitas* which expressed the complicated collection of sentiments, ideas and engagements and denoted the terms of the self-understanding of the Romans and the Roman *orbis*.

It was not the word 'Europe' (in spite of its identification with the land of Japheth), but the words *Christendom, Christianitas, respublica Christiana* which expressed the self-understanding of the peoples who inherited the area otherwise known as Europe from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries.

And perhaps the most interesting chapter of the essay is concerned to show why this should have been a 'religious' self-understanding, to show how much more it meant than merely the membership of a single *ecclesia*, and to show why this idiom of associational identity declined in persuasiveness. No doubt it had a positive meaning, but it signified also a contrast with Islam, and when that contrast declined in significance, the expression Christendom also declined.

Finally, *'Europe'* superseded *'Christendom'*; but 'Europe' here has a new meaning. Not only is it like the earlier expressions, an answer to the question '*Who* am I? and not merely, '*Where* am I?', but it represents a different idiom of self-understanding from that which *Hellas* represented for the Greeks, *Romanitas* to the Romans, *Christianitas* to the mediaeval centuries. It represents a new set of considerations in terms of which to recognize an associated identity: not ancestry, not a common enterprise, not common enemies, not religion, not law, not language, but a 'something' which is the outcome of all of these or earlier beliefs about these. What 'Europe' means is a self-understanding which is the residue of all earlier self-understandings. And in this conclusion Hay's two themes are joined: the fortunes of a word, and the story of successive idioms of associated self-understanding in terms of which the peculiar idiom of self-understanding represented by the word 'Europe' is revealed as an historical event. And it is unique: Asia never had it; Africa spuriously imitated it. 'Asian' and 'African' are adjectives which have never quite released themselves from geography – 'European' has become an adjective which refers to something which may be found in any part of the world.

3. Now, what are we to make of Hay's performance – not the information he give us, but his book as an exercise of historical understanding? He is concerned with what I have called an intellectual occurrence, an idea; and he purports to be concerned with its 'emergence'. Let us compare his enterprise with that of some other writers who are engaged in the same sort of enterprise: Lecky's book called *The Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, Weber's account of the development of the spirit of Capitalism, and Letwin's investigation of the 'origins' of scientific economics. Each of these writers begins with a clear idea of what he designs to investigate. Lecky can and does identify what he understands by the expression 'the spirit of Rationalism'; for Weber the spirit of Capitalism is a collection of related beliefs and ideas which he has distinguished and put together; Letwin can and does identify 'scientific economics' as a system of abstract concepts. And each divulges what he intends to do with the intellectual structure he has identified. Lecky says he is concerned with the 'rise' of the spirit of Rationalism; Weber is less precise, but he seems to be concerned (so to speak) with the constituents of the soil which account for the germination of a seed which was destined to blossom as the spirit of Capitalism; and Letwin says he is concerned with the '*origins*' of what he has identified as 'scientific economics.'

All these writers exhibit at least some of what I would call the characteristic concerns of historical understanding. None is content *merely* to analyse the way of thinking he is investigating into its constituent ideas; each is seeking to connect it with something else, to put it into an historical context. And none of them will have anything to do with general or necessary causes or causal conditions; each is concerned to uncover its connections with evidential circumstances. But a suspicion remains that all this is somewhat qualified by other considerations.

Each of these writers, before he begins, seems to understand so completely *what* he is to enquire about that it is difficult for him to recognize it as a circumstantial intellectual occurrence capable of being understood only in terms of what he has yet to discuss; namely, *how* it came to be *what* it came to be. Each appears to be looking back from a well-understood intellectual situation, Rationalism, Capitalism, scientific economics, to contingent intellectual occurrences in the past which may perhaps illuminate but could not actually constitute its character. For Lecky, the spirit of Rationalism seems to be a way of thinking about and reading the world which is inherent in human capacity, intimated or anticipated in the distant past, and waiting for contingent circumstances, or its own inherent virtues, to push it decisively to the surface. It is as if, for Lecky, this expression has an ascertainable absolute or non-contextual meaning, and that he is now concerned with the circumstances in which it acquired the qualified meaning it came to have in a particular European context. From a humble station, the spirit of Rationalism *rose* to a position of eminence: How did this come about? For Weber, his spirit of capitalism is a coherent collection of attitudes and beliefs and he is concerned with the circumstances of its contingent appearance as an actual so-called life-style. It is not just *what* emerged; it has also, for him, abstract meaning: the rational organization of human attitudes. And with Letwin we are left wondering whether 'scientific economics' is not a way of thinking about human activities inherent in the nature of things, as geometry might be thought to be inherent in the recognition of spatial shapes and relationships, and whether his concern is not merely with the contingent circumstances in which it was gradually discovered. That is to say, the spirit of Rationalism, the spirit of Capitalism and 'scientific economics' are not quite eventualities come upon as the outcomes of a continuous course of intellectual change; they are also abstract possibilities. These writers are more like detectives presented with a rationally understood *fait accompli* who are asking themselves: how did *it* come about. *What* it is and *how* it came about are two questions never finally resolved into one.

But whether or not these suspicions are well-founded it is noticeable that Hay does not lay himself open to them. The 'idea of Europe' is never presented as anything other than an intellectual occurrence of exactly the same sort as the intellectual occurrences – the beliefs and ideas, the questions and answers – which converged, not merely to bring it to the surface, but to constitute it. He does not begin with the idea expressed in the current use of the word 'Europe' and, looking back, ask how did *it* emerge? The *it* is constituted in the emergence. The current idea of Europe, in this book, is an intellectual occurrence given a shape and a meaning in being understood as an eventuality. It is not, like the *dénouement* of an intellectual drama, forecast before it happens. It is not the effect of a cause. It is not an inn already marked on the map towards which intellectual travelers direct their steps. It is more like the relics of a wayside camp set up by people who have already moved on, and who do not, and never did, know where they were going. The current idea of Europe is itself an intellectual vicissitude and nothing more than the outcome of intellectual vicissitudes. In short, Hay's book is an account, not of an 'idea', but of men thinking: asking themselves questions: Where or who am I? and formulating answers in a current language not designed for the purpose of answering those questions. Certainly he has to begin with some focus of attention, but he has managed to start without anything so shapely and substantial as the spirit of capitalism or the spirit of Rationalism. He begins with nothing more than a word in use and the perception that it is being used as a symbol for a variety of different sorts of human self-identification.

Perhaps he would have represented his enterprise more accurately if, instead of calling it 'the emergence of an idea' he had called it the 'history of an idea'. 'Emergence' is ambiguous; he is concerned with one sort of emergence – 'historical emergence'.

EDITORIAL NOTES

[i] LSE 1/1/28. Typescript with autograph corrections. The folder also contains an incomplete autograph draft dated '1979 1980 1981'. D. Hay, *Europe. The Emergence of an Idea*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1957.

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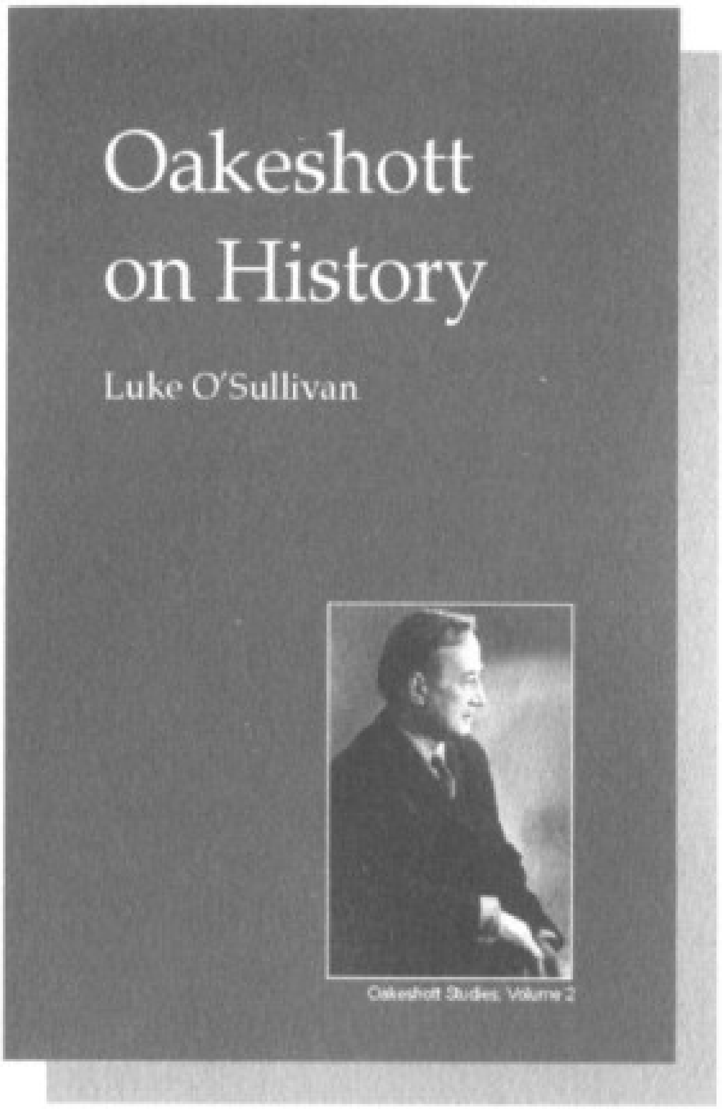

Oakeshott on History

Luke O'Sullivan

308 pp., $40/£25.00,
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This book challenges the common view that Michael Oakeshott was mainly important as a political philosopher by offering the first comprehensive study of his ideas on history. It argues that Oakeshott's writings on the philosophy of history mark him out as the most successful of the philosophers who attempted to establish historical study as an autonomous form of thought during the twentieth century. It also contends that his work on the history of political thought is best seen in the context of debates over the origins of the liberal state. For the first time, extensive use has been made of unpublished material in the collection of Oakeshott's papers at the LSE, resulting in an intellectual biography that should be of interest both to first-time students and those already familiar with his published works.

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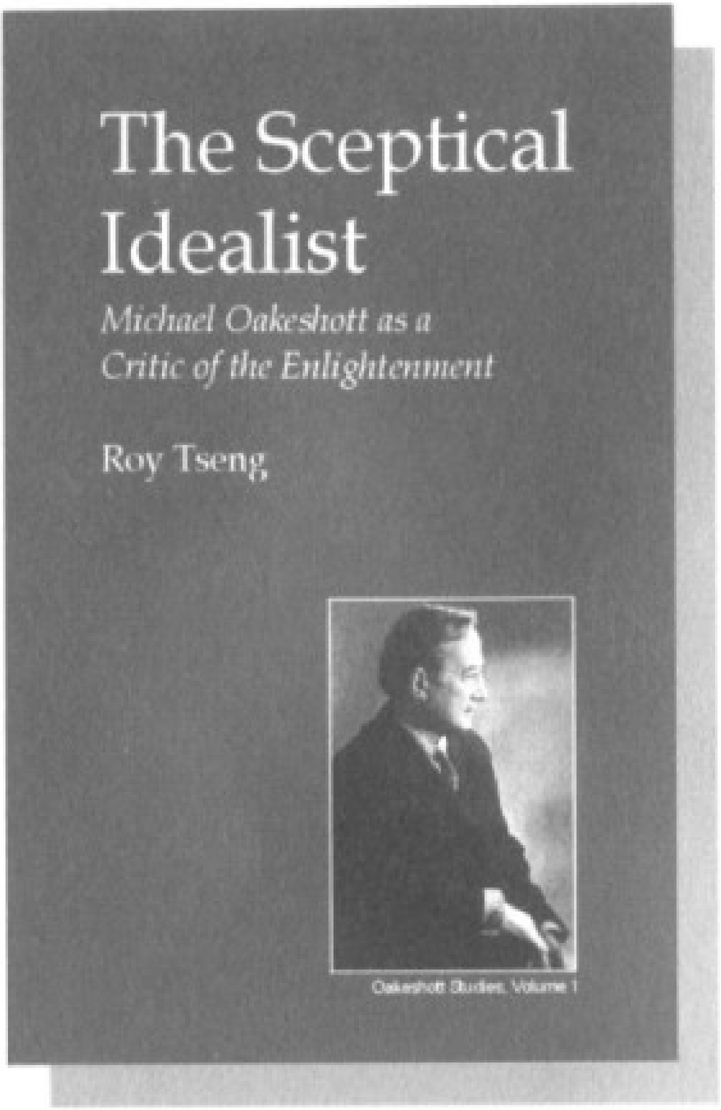

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Michael Oakeshott as a Critic of the Enlightenment

Roy Tseng

Oakeshott Studies, Volume 1

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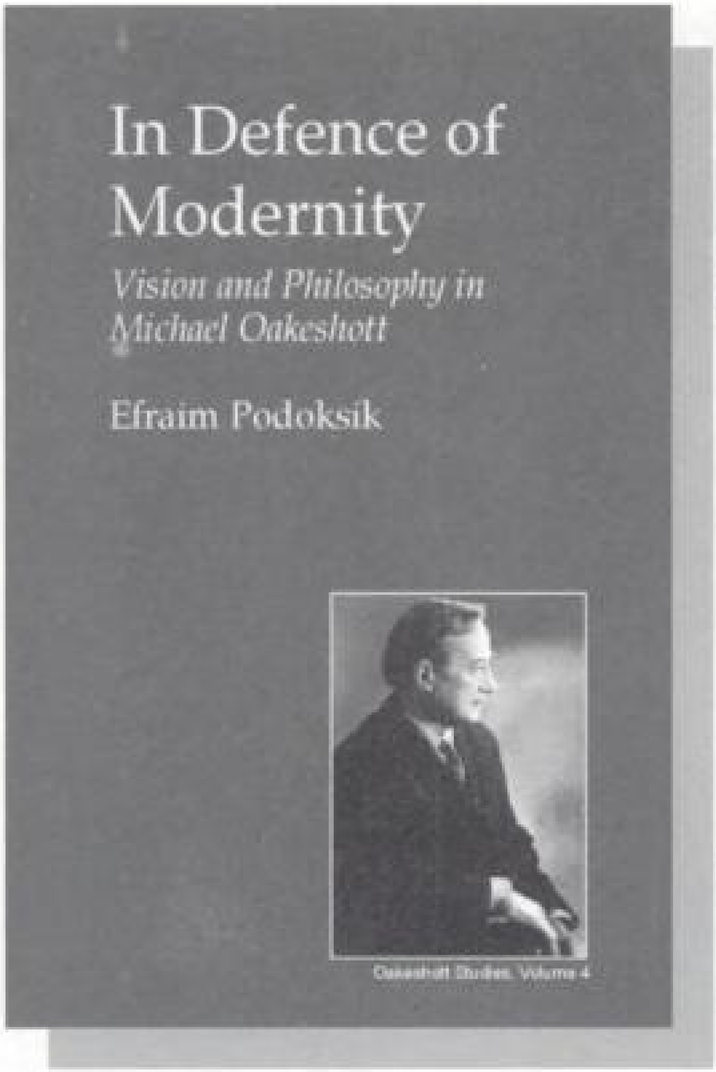

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Vision and Philosophy in Michael Oakeshott
Efraim Podoksik
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Although Oakeshott's philosophy has received considerable attention, the vision which underlies it has been almost completely ignored. This vision, which is rooted in the intellectual debates of his epoch, cements his ideas into a coherent whole and provides a compelling defence of modernity.

The main feature of Oakeshott's vision of modernity is seen here as radical plurality resulting from 'fragmentation' of experience and society. On the level of experience, modernity denies the existence of the hierarchical medieval scheme and argues that there exist independent ways of understanding our world, such as science and history, which cannot be reduced to each other. On the level of society, modernity finds expression in liberal doctrine, according to which society is an aggregate of individuals each pursuing his or her own choices. For Oakeshott, to be modern means not only to recognise this condition of radical plurality but also to learn to appreciate and enjoy it.

Oakeshott did not think that it was possible to find a comprehensive philosophical justification for modernity, therefore the only way to preserve modern civilisation seemed to be an appeal to sentiment. As a consequence he was a passionate defender of liberal education as the best way to underwrite the 'conversation of mankind.'

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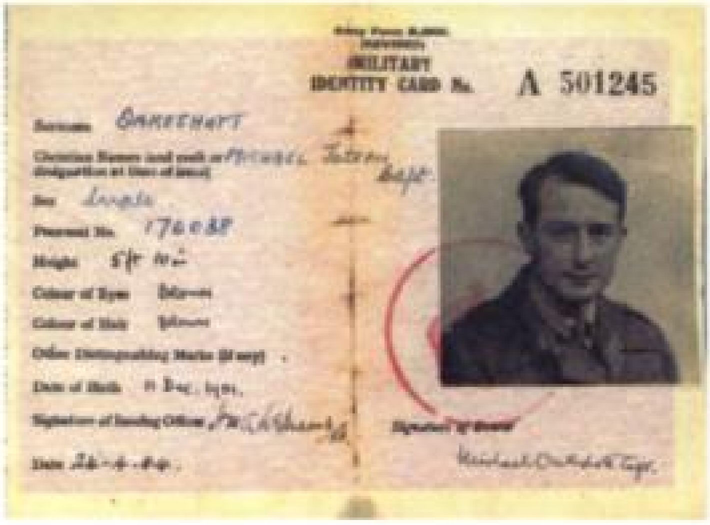

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The book will be indispensable for all Oakeshott's readers, no matter which area of his thought concerns them most.

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